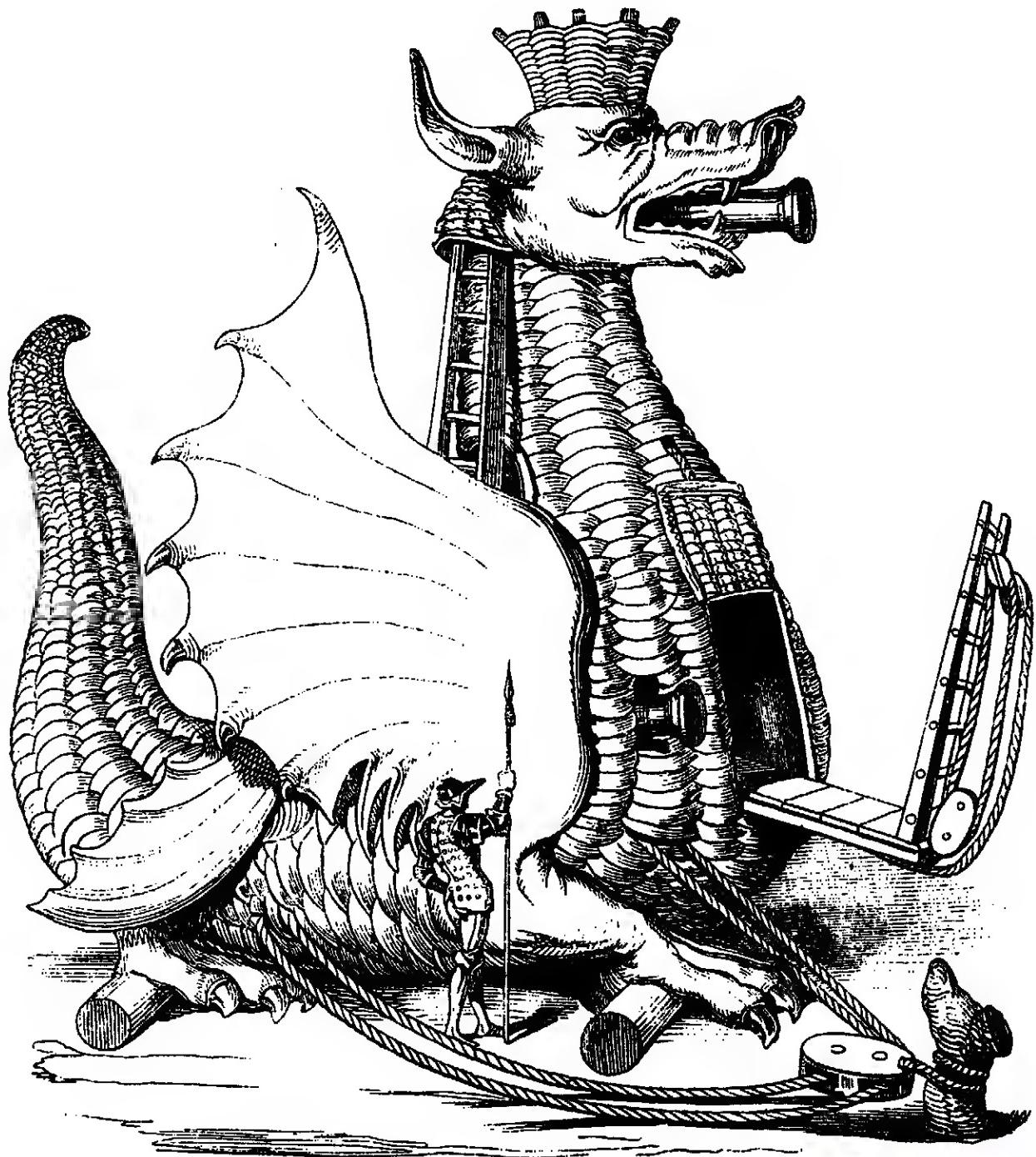


March
1994

INTERREGNUM

1



fantasy roleplaying and more



Welcome to the first issue of Interregnum.

The topic of this issue is *Beginnings*, appropriately enough. It seems only proper, therefore, that I begin with a small explanation of what all this is about.

When I first started writing game material several years ago, there were very few commercial game magazines on the market: Dragon magazine and the newly-debuted White Wolf were pretty much it. It was a narrow selection, too narrow—most of the articles I wanted to write that would never fit into either magazine. But I had to write.

It was a lucky day for me when I discovered Amateur Publishing Associations. They offered a freedom unmatched by any commercial magazine: the freedom to write about anything, in whatever way I wanted. A forum to experiment with new styles, and new concepts. A place where I could display my best ideas, and—best of all!—a chance to get comments on my work from intelligent and perceptive gamers. It was a perfect fix for my writing habit.

And it still is. I continue to write about gaming in The Wild Hunt APA today. But my life has changed since I first began writing: I'm older, and even though I still love gaming and science-fiction/fantasy, the truth is that there's much more to my life than that. The same applies to many other gamers that I've talked to. We don't "grow out" of roleplaying, but we do develop other interests as well. This, then, is an APA for the whole gamer.

What does that mean? Put simply, any subject is acceptable in Interregnum. I ask that there be at least some roleplaying-related material in every zine, and that the contents of the zines be such that mailing them across state lines not be illegal—but beyond that every contributor is free within these pages to write as they wish. Subject, of course, to final editorial approval. A fable might best illustrate that editorial function:

The Kings of the Frogs, one of Aesop's Fables (from the very poor memory of the Editor, with apologies to Aesop)

Once upon a time long ago, a group of frogs lived in a pond. Though the pond was pleasant enough all the frogs could went, they were dissatisfied. "We need a King," they said, "someone to inspire respect." Soon their complaints and prayers reached the ears of God, who took pity and sent down a log to be the King of the Frogs.

For a while the frogs were content, but in time they grew dissatisfied with King Log. "Give us, oh Lord, a new king, for this Log does nothing but lie in the sun," the frogs beseeched. And so God sent down King Stork, who gobbled the foolish frogs up.

Moral: Leave well enough alone.

Call me King Log. 8^>}

I believe that zines that cover all the issues in the lives of gamers will result in better and more meaningful game material, as well. Time will tell.

- I have a large supply of promotional flyers for Interregnum which I'll gladly mail to anyone who would like to distribute them at conventions or game stores. Please write or email me if you'd like to receive some flyers—let me know when you'll need them and how many you'd like.
- It has been suggested that a set of protocols be developed, non-binding recommendations on zine formatting and content. I'd like some feedback: would such things be helpful for new contributors, or a deterrent to individual style?
- Interregnum #2 will be collated on Saturday, April 30th. Zines must reach me by the 28th in order to be included in that issue. I must receive word of zines (via mail, phone, or email) by the 26th in order to include them in the Table of Contents.
- The suggested topic for Interregnum #2 is *Disbelief*. Is it a question of faith, or nothing more than phenomenology? Does it only apply to AD&D™? Does anyone have any good stories about the use of disbelief?
- I almost forgot: my deepest thanks to all those who have sent in zines for this first issue.

INTERREGNUM

#1

*An Amateur Press Association
covering fantasy roleplaying games
and anything that interests those who play them.*

Peter Maranci, ed.

Topic: "Beginnings"

March 1994

Interregnum is an Amateur Press Association, comprised of zines written by individual contributors and mailed to the editor. It is collated and published approximately twelve times per year. New contributors and subscribers are always welcome.

A subscription costs \$2.00 per issue plus the actual cost of the selected method of mailing. Subscribers may open an account from which these costs are deducted by mailing a check or money order in US funds, payable to Peter Maranci, at the following address:

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81 Washington St., #2
Malden, MA 02148

Since **Interregnum** is an amateur production, it is necessary for contributors to help cover the costs of production: \$2 per single-sided master page mailed in. Alternatively, contributors may mail in enough copies of their zine to cover the copy count (which has not yet been determined). The only additional cost to contributors is the price of the postage to mail their issue to them.

All zines sent in for publication in **Interregnum** should be copyrighted by the author. Copyright may be asserted by the use of the following phrase:

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Sample issues of **Interregnum** are available at \$4 each for US addresses, and \$5 in US funds for foreign/overseas mailing.

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Random Rantings and Plaintive Requests

- ⇒ The editor would be most grateful for any help in finding new TrueType fonts—the weirder the better.
- ⇒ Please send word of zines and page counts at least three days in advance of collation—otherwise I may not be able to include your zine in the Table of Contents. Zines which arrive too late to be included in the TOC will nonetheless be included in the issue if humanly possible—otherwise they'll be printed in the following issue.

LOG THAT

#1

© Peter Maranci March 1994

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Hello!

I suppose I had better begin with a quick self-introduction.

I've been living in the Greater Boston area for the past seven years. I'm 30 years old (as of a few weeks ago), work in a law firm downtown doing things I'd rather not think about, and frequently wrestle with the idea of law school. I shoot the occasional amateur video, voraciously read science fiction, fantasy, and old pulp detective novels, and have one of the largest collections of such books that I've ever seen (most of it in boxes due to the space restrictions of my apartment).

I've been writing oversized zines for The Wild Hunt APA for about three years. I write science fiction and fantasy short stories on rare occasions.

My first roleplaying experience was in junior high, with perhaps the ultimate killer GM; I didn't resume gaming until my first year of college in Pennsylvania. There I met an outstanding bunch of gamers who introduced

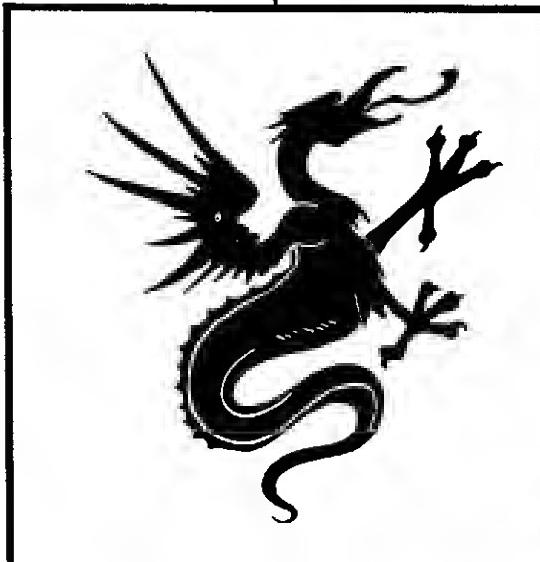
me to deep-characterization roleplaying and the RuneQuest RPG system. I've been gaming and GMing ever since, though in strict point of fact I haven't done much *playing* for more than a year; I GM once a week, though. Most of the time I run sheetless games set in worlds of my own creation, though every so often I get involved in RuneQuest's world of Glorantha.

Let me see...what else? Oh yes. I'm an InterNet addict, and I have a red beard and wear glasses (just to explain my 8^>} icon). Any other questions? Drop me a line.

Bar Wars

The first version of the following article was written over five years ago; I was struck by an idea, and had to write it up. At the time, however, I had no computer. I ended up working on it on an old PC in an empty room at work during lunch.

It received positive responses from my friends, and so I sent it in to a then-major (and now more major) commercial roleplaying magazine. The editor responded quickly: he liked it, but wanted me to remove all the short humorous links between sections and re-submit it. I privately



thought that the humor was one of the better things about the piece (many friends agreed), but nonetheless rewrote the piece as required. Removing the humor made it necessary to create new linking sections, as well as a new introduction and conclusion. It turned out to be quite a job! Given the limited amount of time and computer access I had at the time, it took months before the rewrite was done. But eventually I did finish, and sent it back to the editor for approval.

His response came quickly. He found some of the remaining material in the main body of the work humorous, and wanted it removed; also, there were a few sections that he wanted extensively rewritten. He'd very much like to see it after those changes had been made.

Once again I set to work, and this time the job turned out to be even more extensive than before. It was months of steady work before I could send it back to the editor.

He liked it very much, he assured me. Just one more thing, and we'd almost certainly have a sale. Would I be willing to completely rewrite the piece, changing it from a general "how-to" guide to a list of specific mini-scenarios? And write several new sections, to boot?

Suddenly I discovered a curious thing: I was unable to look at the damn thing, much less rewrite it again. Month upon month of my lunch hours had been spent rewriting the article to the specifications of this humorless ass—and for what? The money was negligible, even compared to my modest salary. I certainly wouldn't gain fame from publication; even the most popular game magazine reaches only the tiniest fraction of the population. And the pride

of having been professionally published was starting to seem very pointless indeed.

I dropped the article in a drawer and forgot about it. A few friends have seen it since but I never published it, even when I started writing a regular zine—perhaps I subconsciously wanted to save it for a special case. In any case I'm pleased that I can present, for the first time in any publication:

GETTING IT TOGETHER: The Cure for the Bar Wars Blues

The majority of Gamemasters are handicapping themselves.

It may seem hard to believe, but most GMs neglect one crucial role-playing design element before the campaign even begins: the Party Origin Story.



The Party Origin Story explains how and why the PCs are together at the start of a roleplaying campaign. It may be created by the GM before play begins, or may consist of the first session or sessions of the new campaign. In any case, it serves to bind the characters together as a group, reducing the chance of party disintegration when differing characters desire to go their

separate ways. It can also serve as a powerful roleplaying enhancement tool for the GMs use: by providing the characters with deeper and more meaningful personal histories, they will have stronger ties to the campaign-world...and that adds to everyone's enjoyment of the game.

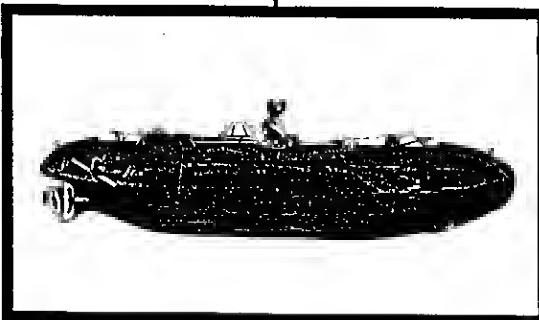
Time and again, throughout the campaign, elements of the Origin Story may be evoked. Old enemies, friends, and mysteries can resurface, with great impact. If desired the Origin Story may act

as a superstructure for the entire campaign; occasional PC interaction with early friends, enemies, and mysteries can provide pivotal points at which the characters may assess their progress from their roots.

A fine example of the Origin Story may be found in the legend of Robin Hood. His noble birth, honorable father, conflict with Norman tax-collectors and eventual outlawry are the foundation of his character; they give his legend meaning. So, too, does his first meeting with Little John. Had Robin Hood and John Little been characters in a modern roleplaying game, they would not have had their famous battle on the log-bridge. Instead they would have met, along with all the other Merry Men, at a local bar and decided to form their band for no reason at all!

Origin Stories may be divided into four basic types. These are:

- 1) A common background. The characters know each other before play begins. They don't have to like each other, but it would help.
- 2) A mutual acquaintance. Someone somehow brings the group together, either intentionally or not. They could be a friend, enemy, or business person.
- 3) A shared oddity. An unusual quality that the characters possess brings them naturally together.
- 4) Sheer happenstance. An Act of God, natural disaster, or other bizarre and random event forces the characters to stick together—at least for a while.



Often more than one theme is used in a single campaign, and in many cases the categories overlap. The following list is by no means complete; it is intended only as an example of some basic starting scenarios. The gamemaster should change, combine, add to, and otherwise customize the examples to fit his or her world. In almost every case, the scenario described may be used in any campaign background with only minor alterations.

* * *

1) The Old Home Town

One way to establish a reasonable link between characters at the beginning of a game is to simply have them all come from the same town or village. As playmates since infancy, they would share common memories of childhood, and would know one another's quirks and foibles from experience ("Sure, Fuzzy's weird, but remember how he bit the schoolteacher who was hitting squint-eyed Janet?"). The home town could serve as a natural focus for the campaign, providing rest, community contacts, and a greater sense of identity to the characters. A threat to the home town would be a natural way for the characters to begin their adventuring lives, and if the party becomes well-known and powerful ("the Protectors of Greentree Village"), foes might threaten the village for any number of reasons.

A drawback to this particular beginning scenario is that characters from the same village might well be rather restricted in type. In sharing the same culture and general background, the group would lose the ethnic/racial/social diversity that can make the gaming experience a three-dimensional one. This drawback may be circumvented, of course; it is possible, for example, that some childhood friends moved away

from the village at a young age (or were kidnapped, or lost), and were taken to a far-off city (or desert, or forest, or planetoid). Only recently have they found their way back to the town and friends they remember from so long ago!

There is, finally, one other advantage to the home town start: barring tragedies, you can always go home again.



2) The Party That Slays Together...

One interesting campaign beginning could go the Home Town route one better for togetherness: all the characters are part of the same family. The possibilities are endless— aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, brothers, sisters, mothers fathers, sons, daughters—even in-laws. After all, if you can't trust your own flesh and blood, who can you trust? An adventuring family would soon acquire a reputation for oddness ("those crazy Stonebenders!"), and might well be the source of some local legends. Generations of adventurers bringing home treasure would give the family great wealth that might well lead to political and economic prominence. Older characters might "retire" to run the family holdings and businesses, adding a political element to the campaign. The family could offer great support to its active members, including free training, funding, and perhaps even a little "special" help, in the form of unusual items of salvage from previous expeditions. Feuds, friendships, debts and obligations: all would take on a multi-

generational quality. If, on the other hand, the gamemaster would prefer not to have to deal with a large family, the characters could be orphaned siblings, or even identical quintuplets!

Many of the drawbacks of the Home Town scenario apply to the Family option as well. Furthermore, one should keep in mind that most homicides take place between members of the same family ("Mom always liked you best!" *thwack!*).

3) The Enemy of My Enemy—Is My Friend!

An excellent reason for a group to form is for mutual protection and revenge. Even if the player characters are completely unrelated—even if they've never met each other before—when they discover that they share a common enemy, it is likely that they will find it desirable to stick together for safety's sake. One campaign theme might have the characters trying to discover why some powerful figure has taken a dislike to them. The Enemy, of course, should be powerful, enigmatic, and patient; he/she/it/they might make some plot against the characters, suffer a defeat (or perhaps win a non-total victory), and not return for months, thus providing a continuing challenge over the years. The Enemy should be carefully created by the gamemaster, of course. Why does he/she/it/they hate the player characters? What is his standing in the community, and how will he prefer to attack? Is his area of power physical, religious, political, social, criminal, etc.? A party used to fighting fierce fanged creatures deep underground would find themselves at quite a disadvantage against a cunning noble with the ear of the King. In any case, the Enemy should not be easily or quickly defeated. The Common Enemy theme is a powerful one, and is an element in several later examples. Here is a simple one:

The characters are approached and hired as agents/ couriers/travel agents for a powerful and

mysterious figure. They are told that the mission will be short, and not too dangerous. The pay is high enough to be irresistible, but not so high as to arouse suspicion. What the characters do not know is that they are being sent into a trap—that they are mere decoys for another group. They are meant to die, but they survive (it would be ridiculous to kill player characters before play begins—but killing some NPCs would impress them). Now the party knows that their former employer is involved in an illegal activity, and furthermore they have strong reasons to desire revenge. Realizing this, it is only natural for the employer to try and eliminate the group as a threat—permanently. If the party ever does manage to destroy the Enemy, perhaps he has relatives—or superiors in a secret society that wishes to take over the world...

4) A Friend In Need

Another classic theme useful to create a sense of group identity among the player characters is that of the common friend. After all, one of the more common ways that real-world people meet each other is through mutual acquaintances. As with the common enemy, the common friend is a theme capable of a number of different uses and permutations; a basic example follows.

Each of the player characters-to-be knows a particular individual by one means or another. To some, he/she may be an old friend of the family. To others, he/she is perhaps a business contact, or a trainer, or a religious official, or a fence. Eventually, in the time-honored tradition of friends everywhere, the friend decides to perform a little matchmaking. Perhaps he has word of some profitable task that his various friends might be interested in performing, and would like to have his

friends owe him a favor. Perhaps he himself is in need of a bodyguard for some reason, and wants to pass a few coins on to the player characters at the same time. In any case, he gets the party together as a working group for the first time.

Taken by itself, this beginning is rather dull. It gets the job done and introduces a major NPC, but does not establish an interesting plot line to be carried on throughout the campaign. On the other hand, this scenario does offer a reasonable way for characters of greatly differing backgrounds to meet and work together; the only requirement is that the characters have to know the NPC friend and be in the general area at the start of the campaign. Of course, some player characters may refuse the initial offer; in that case, it is up to the gamemaster to entice, persuade, or otherwise trick them into joining the campaign. Note that there is no need for the characters to know each other before the friend puts them together. Nor need the individual be a friend; he may simply be someone who needs a service, and hires the adventurers individually, then forms them into a group.

5) Resting In Peace?

The characters have reason to mourn, for they have received word that an old and valued friend has died after a sudden illness. They are invited to attend the funeral; after the ceremony, the will shall be read. The deceased was rather wealthy, and without any close relatives; it is likely that he has left, at the least, some memento of past good times—though hopefully the characters will not be motivated by greed (solely). In any case, all come to the funeral. Some

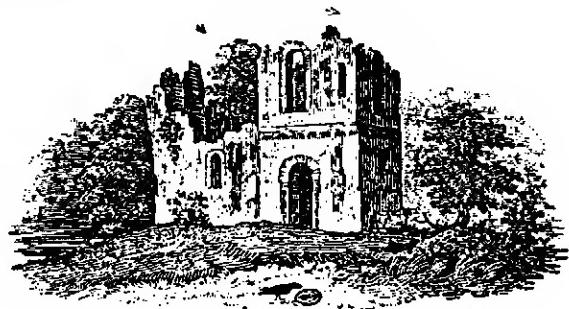


player characters may meet at the funeral for the first time, while others may have been introduced previously. Upon arriving at the house, they are met by the Executor of the estate—a stranger who claims to have been an old friend of the deceased (though the deceased had never mentioned him). Accommodations are available at the local Inn. At the ceremony, the casket is kept closed. Before the coffin can be lowered into the grave, however, there is a disturbance in the crowd—a veiled young women apparently suffers a nervous break down, screaming “He isn’t dead—he’s not in there!”. Lunging forward, she opens the coffin lid part-way before anyone can stop her. Though the lid is slammed down almost immediately by the Executor, the player characters are in such a position as to have seen the contents—and they have seen enough to know, or at least suspect, that the body inside is not that of their old friend. The sobbing, hysterical girl is quickly taken away by two large men in formal wear, at the signal of the Executor. Covering the sounds of the girl’s cries as she is born away by the thugs, he smoothly asks that the guests forgive the girl, who was "...overcome by the loss we all share. Let us not spoil the dignity of this, our friend’s final farewell!".

At the will reading the next day, the player characters are shocked to hear that they have inherited the equivalent of \$20 in cash. This cannot help but raise their suspicions —their old friend had always loved to personalize his gifts, sometimes spending days to choose the perfect birthday present. The bulk of the estate, including the house, has been left to a stranger "...for his many kindnesses and that he may continue his Good Works."

Who knows what mystery lies beneath these strange happenings! Is the friend really dead? If so, where is the body? Perhaps he has been kidnapped by some cult of undead, or is faking his death for business reasons. Who was that

girl, and where is she now? How did she know the truth about the coffin? The Executor may have powerful influence in the city government—he will not look kindly on threats or unproved slander. Can it be that there is something of value hidden in the old friend’s house—is he being tortured, the house being searched? The possibilities are limitless, and any player character worth his salt should find the urge to snoop irresistible.



6) A House Divided (Joint Custody)

The characters are confused, for each has recently received a strange communication. The Lord Banifir Mufti has recently passed away, and has bequeathed an unnamed “object of value” to each of the characters. They are requested to journey to a nearby city to receive their inheritance. A sum of money has been included with the message, sufficient to cover all traveling expenses. A special coach has been chartered to bring the inheritors to the Lord’s manor.

Only one thing is wrong. The characters have never met Lord Mufti—in fact, they’ve never even heard of him, though they can discover through inquiry that he is a reclusive and eccentric noble/philanthropist. Still, the possibility of wealth should prove hard to turn down.

Upon arriving at Mufti Manor, the characters are lavishly received. The Executor (a respected professional shyster) hands each player character a small, oddly-shaped metal plate. Each is a part of a single inscribed document: put together, they form the deed to a large estate in an interesting

(gamemaster-selected) area, including tower, manor house, and perhaps, servants. The will stipulates that the deed-pieces are not transferable; upon the owner's death, they revert to the group possession of all surviving members. The deed has legal force only when completely assembled. Unfortunately, one inheritor is still missing. His piece is held by the Executor, who does not know what has happened to the last inheritor, but will not release any information about that individual. The will stipulates that each inheritor has another twenty-four hours to pick up his/her bequest.

The next morning the Executor announces that the inheritor (a cloaked man who bore the letter of invitation as proof of identity) picked up the deed-piece during the night, and left again without comment. Shortly thereafter, an assassination attempt is made upon the characters. . .

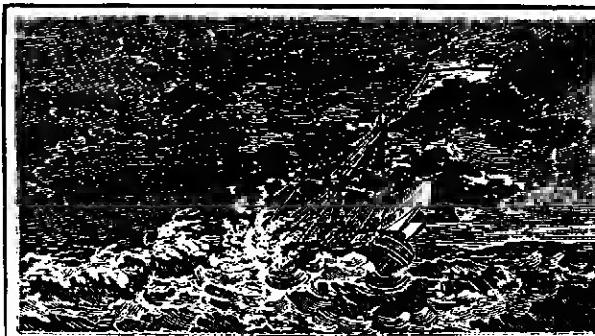
7) Innocent Bystanders

To make use of this beginning, it is helpful if the game world possess some kind of group transportation (coach, subway, or jet) which the characters would use. In an Act of God (?), there is a terrible accident, and the characters are stranded together, far from the beaten path. The character must work together to make their way back to civilization. Though a form of transportation works best for this scenario, any apparently random, isolating accident works quite well—particularly if there is some question as to whether it is really an accident. The dislocation may take place through the actions of a god, or may be the result of some arcane experiment with ancient knowledge. It may even be so mundane an event as a shipwreck. Perhaps the characters are actually

transported to a different world entirely! In any case, the new location should be dangerous, and the characters should realize that there is some way back home, giving them an inducement to stay together. Once the characters have been working as a group for a while, it should be only natural for them to continue—if they work well together, that is.

8) When Gods Play Chess

Through some strange means (magical or scientific) the characters have each been implanted with an uncontrollable impulse to return to a certain desolate spot at a precise time (after all of them have reached adulthood). Upon reaching that spot at midnight, they are surprised to see all the other player characters, arriving simultaneously—and still more surprised by a flash of bright light that scorches each of them without burning. At that moment they discover that they are in mental contact with each other—they can hear each other's thoughts! Though they have never met before, they quickly find that their parents (of those that knew their parents) did.



The characters are all the products of a strange experiment by some unknown god/alien/scientist/whatever. In addition to being mindlinked, they may discover that they experience crippling pain when separated by a certain distance; they may also find that they are exceedingly valued, for one result of the experiment is that their bodies are endowed with a powerful virtue.

In a magic-based world, any body part from a player character serves as a triple strength material component for purposes of enchantment: for example, a player character's eye, when used to make a crystal ball, would make one three

times as powerful/effective as a normal crystal ball, etc. Enchanters would, of course, be extremely interested in this information—and in the characters.

In a science-based world, the character's blood has the power to make those into whom it is transfused 2-12 years younger. Inducement indeed to stick together, and keep moving!



9) Bread Upon the Waters

A group of merchant investors contacts the players. They wish to reap some of the great dividends available to a freelance salvage/protection/investigation group; therefore, they are offering to bankroll the formation of a new corporation by the characters. They will provide limited funds and equipment, and in exchange the characters will return 50% of all their earnings. A contract should be drawn up, and carefully enforced. Occasional duty guarding caravans might be required, and some special missions might be offered at bonus rates. Of course, should the merchants fall out among themselves, the characters could find themselves in the middle of a very nasty trade war...and if mere possession of the contract gives the holder authority over the adventurers, a merry chase might be led by thieves. Consult local laws for further details.

10) Squeeze Play

Each of the characters has a strangely-shaped birthmark in the middle of his forehead. Though they may not know each other to begin with, others may point out the strange similarity of the marks. What do they mean? The mystery of the marks would be a good first investigation-adventure—and as always, if the group works well together they should stay together. As for the marks, perhaps a race of ancient beings has encoded ancient powerful secrets in the genetic codes of the characters' ancestors for record-keeping purposes. Who might be interested in that information? On the other hand, perhaps the marks were actually caused by an unusual pair of birthing-forceps (forceps sometimes do cause birthmarks on the head—Gorbachov is an obvious example). How long will it take the characters to discover that they were all delivered by the same travelling doctor? What is that doctor doing now?

11) The Company

For whatever appropriate reason (boredom, escape, apathy, what have you), each character has been sent by a relative or teacher to apprentice themselves to a prestigious adventuring Company in a far-off land. Each has a letter of introduction, for their sponsors each know a member of the band personally, and have done them favors in the past. Upon arriving, the players are quickly accepted and sworn in as apprentices in the Company; for some reason, there seem to be no old apprentices at present. The characters are instructed to care for the house and lands, and to perform basic apprentice-type tasks. The Company members seem to be good people, and treat the player characters well. After a few weeks, however, they depart to complete a small salvaging operation, leaving the characters behind. Though the round trip was supposed to take only a few days, after more than a week there is still no sign of the Company. The characters' natural concern should become still greater when they discover that tax time is fast approaching, and

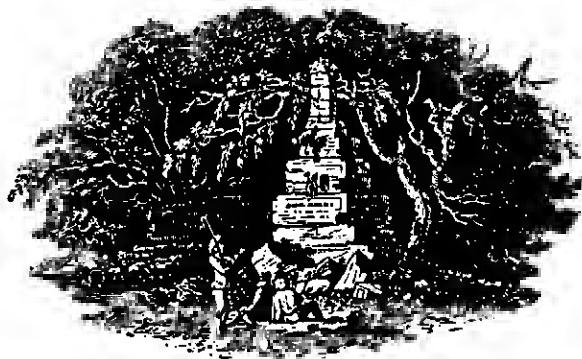
that heavy taxes are due on the Company House. Unfortunately, as apprentices the player characters were never told how to enter the Company treasury. . . . Furthermore, they may later discover that the old apprentices were dismissed for committing an unknown crime. Now the old apprentices view the house and possessions of the Company as theirs—and in their eyes the player characters are unwelcome interlopers. The desire of the old apprentices to re-posses the house is understandable, for the value of the Company name and reputation alone is great. Combined with the other assets of the Company (library, treasury, house, and much more), the worth is incalculable.

However, in addition to facing the hostile and unethical old apprentices (who now call themselves by the Company name), the player characters may well have to deal with all the old business of the Company, including debts, contracts, protection, etc. With all that to deal with, how can the party possibly find the time to look for the old Company members, or improve their own abilities to a point where they can take the old members' places without looking ridiculous?

* * *

It's easy to design a starting scenario that simultaneously works to keep the player characters together, and that provides a strong theme throughout the campaign. Such continuing plot elements give players a stronger feeling for their character's place in the world, resulting in better characterization and roleplay.

To create and run a successful role-playing campaign requires imagination, quick thinking, and hard work. A little forethought and planning at the right time and place can make the gamemaster's task a lot easier.



RuneQuest In Ruins?

HOT OFF THE PRESSES:

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the turmoil that has overtaken my favorite published roleplaying system.

RuneQuest has been undergoing difficulties for the last seven or eight years, at least. When Avalon Hill obtained the publishing rights to the system from the prestigious Chaosium game company (perhaps in 1986?), many were disappointed by the lackluster support given the new *RuneQuest 3* edition. Very little supplementary material was released by Avalon Hill, a sure-fire recipe for failure; after all, who's going to buy a system that's not even supported by its own publisher?

This was quite a disappointment to me. I'd been a strong fan of the system for years, and one of my personal goals had always been to write and have published a supplement for RQ. Though the system seemed to be going nowhere, I still introduced friends to RQ. Often they became enthusiastic fans of the game themselves. Understandably, *RuneQuest* was the first of the skill-based roleplaying systems, and is still one of the best ever produced. In addition, the world of Glorantha which came with the system was one of the best-detailed and most enjoyable game settings available, offering unexcelled scope for deep and fun roleplaying.

Thus I was most pleased when interest in RuneQuest showed strong signs of reviving. And I was delighted to be a playtester for RuneQuest 4!

Grass-roots support for the system has been growing at an astounding pace. The InterNet is a hotbed of activity; two electronic mailing lists, the **RuneQuest Daily Digest** and the **RuneQuest 4 Playtest Discussion List** generate enormous amounts of intelligent and interesting text every day. In fact, I doubt that any roleplaying system in the world—even **AD&D!**—has generated as much intellectual discussion as RQ.

Though the initial playtest version of RuneQuest 4 had many flaws, the new version, **RuneQuest: Adventures in Glorantha** seemed definitely on the right track. Many problems from the previous playtest edition had been corrected, along with some minor problems from RuneQuest 3. The enthusiasm of the participants in the InterNet discussion groups made it seem likely that there would be a plethora of new RQ material; though Avalon Hill was apparently only interested in publishing a few supplements every year, more would surely be available from other sources, and on the Net.

And then just a few days ago Greg Stafford, the creator of Glorantha and President of Chaosium, refused permission to have the manuscript published.

I don't know all the details of what happened, unfortunately. For no reason that I can discover, my subscription to the **RuneQuest 4 Playtest Discussion List** where all this was being discussed was suddenly cancelled just as the refusal was announced. Frustrating!

However, the situation does disturb me. I've become more and more inclined to run my own worlds as time has gone by; only a few weeks ago I ran a one-shot scenario without dice or a system of any kind (I'll write up that experience in a later

issue). I don't need **RuneQuest 4**. But I do have a strong sentimental attachment to it. Granted, the new version wasn't perfect. It was overly complex, and in some areas the writing was a bit awkward. Still it was clearly superior to most of the new roleplaying material on the market today.

I don't know what Greg Stafford's reasoning was. I'm too much of an iconoclast to take *anyone's* word as written in stone, but I do respect Greg's judgement. I assume we'll hear some more details from him soon (if I ever get re-subscribed to the discussion list, that is). And I'm not ready to fly off the handle about this—some people are understandably quite upset about this unexpected development, having spent years working on the project. I suspect that there has been a lot of misunderstanding and miscommunication involved. Still, this sort of ruckus is the last thing **RuneQuest** or **Glorantha** needs. I'll report on further details as they develop.

NEXT ISSUE:

Book reviews, CD-ROM reviews, possibly some fiction...and of course more roleplaying material.

—>*Pete*

Colophon:

Interregnum #1 was partly written using **PC-Write 2.5**, an old but venerable editor. It was formatted for desktop publication using **Publish-It 4.0** for Windows.

Secret message? But I can't think of anything funny to say!



THE EIGHT TRACK MIND

Ramblings on RPGs, SF, and Misc.

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INTRODUCTIONS

Howdy! I'm Virgil, as you can see above. My RPG experience started with AD&D (gee, like nobody else did), and I've played Traveller, RuneQuest, GURPS, Call of Cthulhu, a Nightlife game that changed into Vampire, Paranoia, and IFGS live-action games. I've GM'ed RQ and GURPS games with questionable success. I'm also slightly familiar with TWERPS (anybody ever play it?), Attack of the Humans, and maybe some others. I'm not into super-serious gaming, but I still believe in Role-Playing over Roll-Playing. Subjects I write about here will be somewhat random, and I may go from one topic to another without warning. I don't have a one track mind, but an eight track mind. :)

SERIOUS ROLE-PLAYING, INTROSPECTION, AND FUN (or, why are we playing?)

Once upon a time there was a Duck named Jorl Swiftbill. He was a character of mine in a RuneQuest game. Jorl was a shaman, and a relative primitive. I had not played much RuneQuest, and I was quite unfamiliar with the world of Glorantha. In the AD&D games I'd played, it wasn't tremendously important to have a detailed background for the character, and I hadn't figured on Jorl being a central character in

the game. So, his background was mostly provided by the GM and his reason for being in the party was also provided by the GM.

When Jorl arrived in the city of Pavis, he was to find a certain person who could help him with a problem his tribe was having. Took a bit, but he found her and also met his future party associates who were also in Pavis to meet with the woman's organization. As things turned out he found himself involved in unexpected complications, and didn't get the help he needed. He tried to get help from the Lhankor Mhy sages (LM is a Gloranthan knowledge god), but found that it was incredibly expensive, had no realistic assurance of success, and in any event they weren't terribly inclined to help.

He and his fellow party members went out to his tribe to see if maybe there was something they could do. Well...once we got back to the tribe, I found out that the problem was a lot more serious than I had expected. I had assumed that it was something that the party could solve relatively quickly with a bit of thought and effort, and then we'd get on to the business of adventuring. I hadn't expected the duck's problem to be a major adventure in and of itself. Plus, there were other problems that the tribe had with a dangerous enemy. After we left the tribe to try to deal with its

problems we were in tremendous danger, we couldn't find a solution to the tribe's original problems, and Jorl was having problems with his faith. He had become tainted because he had allowed sorcery spells to be cast on him (note: in RQ, there are three kinds of magic; Spirit or Battle magic, Divine or Rune magic, and Sorcery. Spirit magic is used by shamans and generally doesn't interact with Sorcery.), and for other reason.

Jorl was having incredible trouble. He wasn't able to find a solution to the tribe's problem. He was not able to get rid of the taint. He was constantly being picked on by the dragonewt PC, with no way to deal with him due to the dragonewt's greater size and strength, and the 'newt's immortality, and my general disinclination to personal conflict. Jorl's life paralleled mine in a lot of ways; a sense of failure and feelings of having betrayed faith.

At this point I should be writing about how Jorl overcame his problems, and how I learned from this ways to improve my own life. Uhhh, well, that's not what happened.

Jorl tried and tried to deal with the taint, and the tribe's problem. He tried to travel on the spirit plane to Daka Fal, the Judge of the Dead and the First Ancestor, to learn how to get rid of the taint. The answers he got weren't answers, but just a re-

affirmation that he'd messed up. The taint was so obvious that other shamans could see it, and shunned him. The dragonewt determined that Jorl was the cause of the party's problems and that Jorl was a great sinner against his way after a shaman told him of the taint. He on occasion tried to kill Jorl, though it was hidden by the erratic 'newt nature so it couldn't be proven that he was trying to kill him. Ultimately, Jorl dealt with the tribe's problem with a fix that really didn't cure the problem. He stayed with the party for a while after that, but eventually he left. Not for character reasons; I was just sick of the duck's problems and so were the other players.



I'm not happy about what happened with Jorl. The problem his tribe faced was made out to be so major that it was not realistic that he could solve it. The taint he gained was questionable; nothing in the RQ rules

indicated that there was a problem with another player casting a sorcery spell on him to save his life. And he couldn't deal with the dragonewt's persecution in character; there was no way to kill the 'newt without destroying the 'newt's soul, and Jorl would never do that.

Why did I stay in the campaign, and why did I keep this character? Initially, it was a fun game. It was the first time I'd really gotten heavily into a character. The GM created more of a feeling of depth to

the world. After a while though, it was more a question of just showing that I wasn't a quitter. There had to be solutions and answers, I just couldn't find them. Maybe if I stuck with it, I'd find them and then it would all be worth it. Truth is, there weren't answers I could find.



What should I have done? First off, I should have provided Jorl with more of a background instead of going with what the GM provided. Part of the problem was that I envisioned things differently than the GM did. Second, I needed to know more about the world. I didn't really know how the world worked, and I just accepted what I was told. The duck's background would have been MUCH different had I known more about the world; the provided background was a bit absurd (yes, I know ducks are absurd :)). I didn't control as much of the duck's creation as I should

have.

As to dealing with the duck's taint, I had two choices. One was ritual cleansing. I didn't think of it at the time, but this should have been something that a shaman would know. Jorl's ignorance of the ritual was a bit like a Catholic priest not knowing about the Confessional. The second was ritual suicide. I did think of that; since Jorl had a taint that couldn't be eliminated it seemed appropriate. But I didn't want to kill him. I've never suicided a character (there's a perception that I did just that in an AD&D campaign, reality is that I figured the only way to kill the monster was to just keep beating on it in close melee) and it seemed too much like, well, being a quitter. I think I'd have felt better about this whole thing though if Jorl had committed ritual suicide; it would have been more in character.

Now why have a gone on about all this? I got so into Jorl and his problems were so similar to my real-world problems that it was somewhat traumatic playing him. It wasn't escapism, it was continued frustration that I couldn't overcome. I'm not trying to say that games should be easy, but that the whole point is to have fun! If we get too involved (or not enough involved), it ceases to be fun. But we now have games like Vampire: The Masquerade in which part of the game is dealing with the dark sides of human nature, and with the player's own dark side. Storytellers (GMs) are encouraged to emphasize to the players that their characters have this evil side, and in one article in White Wolf they are encouraged to discourage their players from

coming up with ways around having to kill or harm people to get blood. I'm not sure that philosophical explorations of the dark side of human nature are a good RPG subject. How serious do we want to get in a game?



RPG MAGAZINES

There seem to be more RPG magazines around now than there were a few years ago. But what ones out there are worth spending one's hard earned funds on? I'll go over some of the magazines I'm familiar with, and my biased impressions.

* DRAGON

This is of course TSR's magazine. As such, there's lots of articles on AD&D and other TSR products, and not a lot on other systems. It does have a good computer game review section (currently written by Sandy Peterson of Call of Cthulhu and DOOM! fame), and fair comics. Its overall minuses? If you don't run TSR games, there's really not much there for you. Its pluses? It is a slick, well produced magazine, and the

articles can probably be adapted to work with whatever system you use.

* WHITE WOLF

This magazine is unusual in that the magazine came first, and then the game company. White Wolf merged with Lion Rampant and now produces the (in)famous Storyteller games like Vampire: the Masquerade and Werewolf: the Apocalypse. The magazine has generally made an effort to cover all systems including games from smaller companies. The magazine has generally avoided humor, except for jests about people in the company or in the industry (and stupid pictures of groups of people flipping off the photographer). The company philosophy seems to be to take RPG gaming seriously, as an artform. It has a new editor now, and is undergoing changes. It now has a comic, "Legacy Rite", which is set in the Werewolf game universe. And they're having articles on sex in RPGs (not a bad idea, must folk treat it as sort of a joke) and other serious topics. Its overall minuses? It takes gaming perhaps too seriously, but this could just be a reflection of the sort of folk who play Vampire and its associated games. One of the line reviewers criticized one Vampire supplement as "reduces Vampire to the same level of mindless violence found in any other RPG". Uhhh, yeah, it's better to play blood-drinking, dangerous, undead doomed to lose their humanity. It's all in the play, any game be a mess of pointless violence (end sermon). Its overall pluses? They try to be balanced in their reviews; major reviews have one main review and one or more alternate views. Their coverage

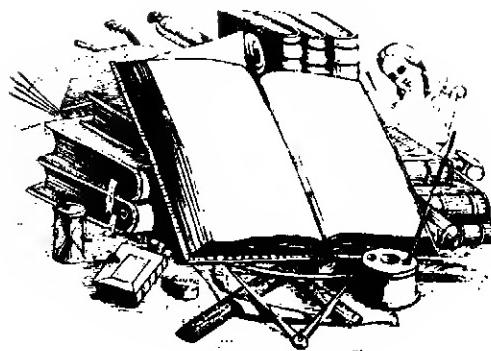
of various systems is pretty good; they have line reviewers for most systems. I think it is more likely to be useful than the Dragon.

* PYRAMID

The new publication from the nice folk at Steve Jackson Games. This is more like the old Space Gamer than the magazine currently bearing the name. It has a good coverage of non-SJG games, to the point of having the feature articles generally involving other companies systems. It has Murphy's Rules! It goes maybe a bit over board on humor, with article on "Hampire, The Masked Ace Raid" for Toon (Pigs we are, lest pigs we become), and the Cheese school of magic for GURPS. Its minuses? It may be a bit too goofy at times. Its pluses? If you play GURPS, or Car Wars, you need this magazine. It covers other systems pretty well. And it has Murphy's Rules!

* CRYPTYCH

Cryptyч is an independent gaming magazine. It isn't as slick as the above magazines, but it has a fair coverage of a lot of games, including non-RPGs like Magic: The Gathering. Its most striking difference is that it has newsletters from a variety of gaming (and related) companies; including Mayfair, Wizards of the Coast, and West End Games. Mediocre comics. Its minuses? It may be harder to find. Its pluses? Its incorporation of company newsletters is an interesting touch.



* SHADIS

Shadis is another independent gaming magazine. It is even less slick than Cryptyч, with pulpish paper. But it is thick and covers a lot of the minor systems and has lots of articles. It has pretty good comics and a lot of industry news and rumor. Its minuses? Well, it does look a bit cheap because of the low grade paper. Its pluses? The comics are pretty good, although I wish they wouldn't have stopped "Joe Genero" (the average man) when they added "Fineous Fingers". And lots of articles and news.

* VORTEX

Another independent magazine. Good general gaming coverage and articles. One comic, "Stellar Babe" which is a bit sexist maybe and got Stellar Games angry at them. But any magazine whose editor is "the Guidance Ro-Man" and features a schedule for Mystery Science Theatre 3000 has to be good. Its minuses? Well, I don't know if it still exists; I haven't seen a new issue in some time. Its pluses? The Guidance Ro-Man featured not just in the editorials bit in a little image at the end of articles.

* CHALLENGE

Game Designer's Workshop's magazine supporting SF RPGs. Pretty good overall, and pretty fair in coverage. Generally no comics, but they did have an April Fool section last year. Its minuses? If you don't

play SF RPGs, it has little to offer you. Its pluses? Pretty good article for SF games, even some that aren't in print anymore. A necessity for Traveller gamers.

My overall impression is that the independents seem to try more to cover the minor games, and have more general articles. The gaming company magazines provide the most thorough coverage of their systems. I think it is quite possible that White Wolf magazine may not be around in a couple years. Dragon will never die, of course.

RANDOM THOUGHTS

Q: How many Dangerous Journeys Player Characters does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Oh, you mean Heroic Personae, and a lyte bullbe!

Except for one game that was pretty much AD&D, I've never been in a successful Traveller campaign. They all turned into TradingQuest.

Q: How many Vampire: The Masquerade characters does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Who needs a light with all this bright sunshine? WHAT! SUNSHINE! AH-HHH!!!!

Most of my gaming buddies have a

disdain for commercial RPG modules. It seems to me that they should be very useful in providing more detailed scenarios. Oddly though, I've never run a published module. Not sure what this means.

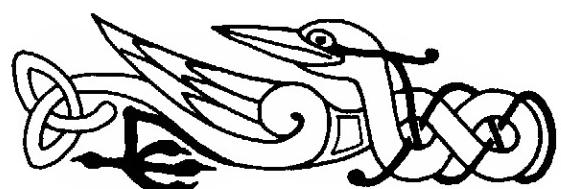
Q: How many Call of Cthulhu characters does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Wait! That's not a light b.....

We seem to be in the Golden Age of SFTV. With all the current shows, plus a possible return of Dr. Who in the form of a co-production between Amblin (Steven Speilberg's company) and the BBC. But for all the shows featuring a future in space, the various manned space programs are in serious trouble. Is SF becoming nothing but escapism, rather than an inspiration to greatness?

IN THE FUTURE

In future installments, I hope to write more about the Golden Age of SF TV, RPG magazines, weird adventure ideas, RuneQuest: Adventures in Glorantha, and other stuff. And of course the traditional comments on the contribution of other writers to Interregnum. And remember everybody, this is the special Collector's Issue! :)





THE PLAYER
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SPRINGTIME IN GAMELAND: PLANNING AND PLANTING

"We must cultivate our garden."
—Voltaire, Candide

The lake outside is still a sheet of ice, pockmarked by the rain and the eroded footprints and ski tracks uncovered by the thaw.

But the air is moist, fragrant with the smell of clay and dead leaves and the promise of thaw. And though the yard is drab and brown, a rainbow of brightly-colored garden catalogs sits on my living room table, promising me the romance of summer.

My gardening has always reminded me of gaming, at least in the process. I can spend a great deal of time planning gardens that never come to pass, or characters that I never get to play. But I still enjoy the pure anticipation, even if I never fulfill it.

Both have books with glossy color illustrations to inspire us. Both require some degree of advance planning. In both we are sometimes lured to try extravagant projects that overwhelm us in the middle. Both are full of unexpected mid-season developments--plants that come up too close together, too many players spoiling the game, a surprising drought, gamers who drop because they just don't like the gaming style or the time slot, weather too

cool for plants to fruit, campaign too slow to develop excitement.

The rewards of both come in spurts and cycles. I'm either drowning in an abundance of zinnias and tomatoes or reduced to buying pale imitations at my local market; at times I wallow in a surfeit of gamers attracted by our campaign, while at other times I'm reduced to searching the game store bulletin board.

Lately I've been enjoying an abundance of good gaming. I play in a campaign set in Northern Spain in the twelfth century, which has been very enjoyable. The interplay of Moorish, Christian and Celtic culture has been fun, as has playing around with the Ars Magica system.

I'm also working on a character for a new campaign set in seventeenth century Paris, with a dash of vampirism. We've discovered that a Vampire ad is very useful for attracting a gender-balanced cross-section of gamers, since so far three men and two women have expressed interest from the ad. I've heard that women are more interested in vampire genre games, but I'm still hesitant to generalize that far.

I love these historical campaigns. It makes character creation much easier, since I have a clearer picture of the homes, the families, the education available, the culture. Pure fantasy

settings drive me crazy in that respect. The French campaign has been wonderful, particularly since so many individuals from that time period were devoted correspondents, writing reams of letters that describe their daily life and routines.

Since the other players are not reading this, I can reveal that one of the underpinnings of the game is the conflict among and between the Children of the Dark (those who drink blood for power), the Children of the Moon (those tied to the rhythms of the earth), and the Children of the Sun (those with high occult potential, whose blood is very attractive to Children of the Dark, much like the "golden" described in Lucius Shepard's novel of the same title).



My character is Angelique Volange de Montfleur de Kercado, a young widow of Breton background, who lives with her son Christophe on the Place Royal in Paris. She dropped in social status for marrying below her class and into money. Her late husband's relatives have embroiled her in lengthy litigation over the estate of her late husband, Robert Volange, who passed away four years ago.

She is an intelligent, well-read woman, with some occult interests and training. Unfortunately, she was completely ignorant of the divisions between sun, moon and dark, when she came to Paris. Shortly after her marriage, she was seduced by Etienne de Charbonneau, a Child of the Dark who planned to use her as a source of power as part of his revenge upon her father and the de Kercado family, which is one of the major "golden" bloodlines.

Etienne's plan was partially frustrated when the entranced Angelique partook of his "drinker's" blood that transforms, and by the interruption of a large silver wolf which drove Etienne away. The wolf proved to be her maid, Alyce, a Child of the Moon. The weeping Alyce, remorseful for her failure to rescue her earlier, gave Angelique her blood, which she said would "save" her from certain destruction. As Alyce poetically explained to her, Angelique now combines three bloods. What is poetic to Alyce, though, is an abomination to most others, and Angelique has made enemies in the realms of Moon and Dark.

As she was pregnant at the time of the assault, she feared greatly for her child's health, but Christophe has seemed quite normal (although people thought her quite eccentric for not hiring a wet nurse--but she couldn't explain her fears).

The effects of the bloods seems muted in Angelique, perhaps because she shuns the ways of the Moon and the Dark. She has resisted her occasional cravings for blood, on the advice of a "drinker" who predicted that she could avoid the Dark if she avoided drinking. Still, her

senses are keener, sometimes painfully so, and she now prefers to be up in the quiet of evening rather than in the day. And she has come to realize, to her regret, that her mixed blood is a secret that sets her apart from those that she most yearns to be close to.

She fears the Children of the Dark greatly, and dares not openly oppose them lest she become the focus of their wrath. She has struggled to increase her own powers to better defend herself and her son, but is convinced that a low profile is the best defense.

As the campaign begins, Angelique's player-character cousins, Davin and Zoe, have run away to Paris. They are as golden and ignorant as she was when she came to Paris, and she is determined to save them from her fate.

What follows are some NPC sketches that I created in conjunction with the referee and other players. The sketches are done from Angelique's point of view.

FRIENDS & LOVERS

The Comtesse Louise de Villier -- a short brunette woman with dark eyes and great energy and enthusiasm, who presides over a salon.

She is an avid reader with an excellent sense of humor. She and Angelique both love the works of Montaigne, Francois Villon, and Christine de Pisan. They are good friends and correspondents, and like to attend salons, concerts by Lully or the theatre together. Louise is from Normandy and sympathetic to what it is like to be from the provinces,

although she spent more time in Paris when she was younger.

Louise is married, but does not often socialize with her husband, Lucien. Lucien goes his separate ways, and Louise struggles constantly with him to keep his expenses in check. She has two children, a boy Christophe's age, Gaston, and a girl a few years younger, Celeste, who has just returned from her wet-nurse. Louise has many admirers, but no lover at the moment.

Louise lives across the Place Royal, in the Hotel de Villiers.



The Abbe Jean Paul de Kercado -- Angelique's cousin and trusted friend. A man in his 30s, with a medium build and thinning brown/blonde hair. Angelique has him over for dinner each Sunday evening. His brother, Philippe de Kercado has an open invitation for dinner Sunday nights if he is in town. Jean-Paul lives in a modest hotel on the Left Bank. Angelique has donated money to advance his religious career.

Angelique values his practical advice on finance and business, as well as his down-to-earth views of Paris.

Philippe de Kercado -- Angelique's cousin, friend and childhood playmate. Angelique thinks he cuts a rather dashing

figure as a King's Musketeer, with his blue-green eyes, tousled blond hair and blue tabard. He has seemed somewhat distant ever since he moved to Paris, which Angelique attributes to his moving in other circles.

He lives by the Pont Neuf, in a building filled with his comrades.

Camille L'enfant -- a striking woman (and player character) with dark hair and dark eyes and a face of odd angles and shadows, who lives in a second floor flat on the Ile St. Louis. Camille studies herbalism with Angelique, and occasionally accompanies her to Louise's salon. A courtesan of great discretion, she prefers to avoid very public settings where she might encounter clientele.

Camille has one eccentricity, in that she maintains a dual identity in which she dresses rather convincingly as a young man and calls herself Justin Menage. Angelique has never figured out a polite way to mention that she is aware of this eccentricity, much less question Camille for her reasons.

Guillaume d'Agenois -- Angelique's maternal uncle, and the father to Davin and Zoe. Guillaume is a courtier (of the worst kind, Angelique thinks). An inveterate namedropper who is always telling stories about the time he spoke to M'sieur, or the time that the Queen's Superintendent of Chambers sat next to him at dinner.

He comes to Sunday dinner occasionally at Angelique's, if he can't get an invitation anywhere else. Angelique is still annoyed that he wouldn't associate

with her when her husband was alive (because he was common). One of her small pleasures is turning down his requests for loans.

When he can't cadge an apartment at Versailles, Guillame lives in a modest second floor flat on the Ile St. Louis.



Corinne (last name unknown) -- Appears to be in late 20s, with striking dark skin and black hair that she wears in a single long unfashionable braid. Angelique has never known anyone with such a frightening disregard for fashion. While she respects individuality, she is glad that Corinne dislikes walking in public.

Corinne is one of what Angelique discreetly calls "drinkers," and has educated Angelique greatly in this regard.

Etienne de Charbonneau -- One-time lover of Angelique. A powerful "drinker" with high ambition, a bad reputation, and a magnet for trouble. Appears to be in mid-20s, with pale skin and black hair that waves dashingly over one eye. His lips are full and sensuous, his eyes dangerous, his profile aquiline-- need we say more?

Just as shallow as his looks. One friend called him "a wolf in looks and brain." Angelique is simultaneously attracted and repelled by him. She originally sought to protect herself and her family against him by winning his affection and weakening his will with gifts of her blood.

As her pregnancy advanced, she had to terminate that strategy, but she hopes and believes it was successful. Etienne complied when she exerted her will against him and told him he must stay away while she raised her son, though he was angry. She prays that she will never have to openly oppose him, as she is not sure she could win.

THE CIRCLE

Angelique also plays cards regularly with a select group of women who share her interest in herbalism and ritual. These include:

Sabine (last name unknown) -- Appears to be in her 60s, with white hair worn in a crown of braids, and pale blue eyes that look right through you. Her dress, though shabby, is clean, and she always wears a fresh apron. She has an elegance about her (arrogance, say some) despite her shabby clothes.

Sabine is perceptive and compassionate, and full of good advice. She doesn't talk much about herself, but is good at drawing others out. Angelique doesn't know where she lives, but her patois is that of the market and quays, and Angelique has sometimes caught sight of her in the market pushing a cart, but has never seen what she sells. She sometimes

shocks Angelique with the strange amulets that she wears under her clothes; the dried frog in particular seemed at odds with the freshly pressed apron.

Madame Dominique de Kalanine --

Appears to be in her 40s. She is very thin, with a stiffly erect carriage. If not for her dark hair, she would appear much older, although her snapping dark eyes and high cheekbones still make her a formidable figure. She is of a noble Breton family, and a friend of Angelique's mother, although Angelique can't imagine what they have in common.

Madame de Kalanine is very severe, with little sense of humor. She is prone to complain of the deterioration in manners in society, particularly of servants and young people. Not surprisingly, she has a hard time keeping servants, a matter of many jokes among the other women in the card circle.

Madame lives on the Ile St. Louis.

Madame Annette Mercier -- Appears to be in her early 40s. She is portly, with dark hair, perpetually rosy cheeks and warm brown eyes. She is very unaffected, jolly and chatty. She "knows" just how to solve everyone's problems, and isn't afraid to share her opinions even when unwanted. She loves cats, as well she ought, since she owns eight of them, all of which seem to be named "Precieuse."

She is a widow who seems comfortably well off. Angelique isn't sure just where she lives

Madame Marie-Louise Trechet -- Is in her late 20s. She is petite, with ash brown

hair, sallow skin and sharp features. She is very quiet, almost mousy. It is easy to forget that she is there.

Angelique has no idea where she lives or if she is/was married, as she has never been able to draw her out that much in conversation.

Madame Sophia de Cinqueda -- An Italian woman in her late 30s, who claims her mother came with Marie de Medici's entourage to Paris. She is rather pretty, but Angelique thinks the amount of rouge she wears is vulgar. Still, it is very entertaining to hear about her succession of lovers, and she has a wicked sense of humor.



Madame Henrietta de Sevilla -- A fiery Spanish lady of great age, whose lined face seems ancient. She is extremely short, with thick black hair that has a remarkable streak of white through it. Her French is poor and thickly accented, and she often lapses into Spanish when her emotions are aroused.

Mademoiselle Isabel de Sevilla -- Madame Henrietta's daughter, who is 18 or 19. She is of average height and

attractive appearance, but her most striking feature is her hair, which is remarkable for its rich red color. She is quiet, but Angelique thinks she would be more forthcoming if her mother wasn't there. Angelique finds it amazing that Isabel is still unmarried.

Madame Elisabeth de Bonneville -- She is in her early 20s. She obstinately refuses to powder her ruddy complexion, which is a pity, since her honey-colored hair and green eyes are very pretty otherwise. Elisabeth is English, and married into the de Bonnevilles. She is a charming conversationalist, and well-read, if one likes English writers. She has three children.

SERVANTS

Beren Clairedonne -- stout Breton footman at Hotel Volange, and loyal servant of the Kercado family for many years. Not as intelligent or aggressive as his niece, Alyce. He is a Child of the Moon, and disapproves of Alyce's sharing of the blood with Angelique. "No good will come of it," he frequently says.

Alyce Clairedonne -- Breton ladies' maid at Hotel Volange, and Beren's niece. Angelique's childhood playmate. Shorter than Angelique, with dark hair. A vigorous, attractive girl with a lot of common sense and not much education. A Child of the Moon, she greatly prefers the country to Paris.

Anne Pennard -- Christophe's governess, of a bourgeois family in Paris that was originally from Bretagne. Young, plump, with brown eyes, curly chestnut hair and a

chattering manner. Not well educated, but knows a little.

Guendole Lefarge -- Cook at Hotel Volange. A middle-aged stout woman with dark hair peppered with gray. Not into the new-fangled "essences." Believes in comfort food--stews, hearty bread, etc. A sore spot with Angelique, who would like to have more fashionable food, but doesn't have the heart to fire her.

BUSINESS ACQUAINTANCES

Tailor -- A good tailor and dressmaker is essential. Robert's tailor was M'sieur Montreux, and she still uses him frequently. However, Louise introduced her to Madame Belvedere, whose knack with furbelows and lace is amazing, n'est-ce pas?

Vintners -- Living in Paris has broadened her tastes, but she likes her Muscadet, Gamay, hydromel (mead), and cidre bouche (flat cider) for a taste of home. Her favorite vintner is Luc Aubuisson.

Booksellers -- Angelique adores the booksellers. She and Louise visit frequently on the Pont-Neuf, where they like old Fouquet's stall for philosophy and current material and the widow Nevillon's shop for medieval lays and poetry.

Attorneys -- Antoine Claret, of the firm of Sabien and Claret (Antoine is the son of the founding partner). Angelique hopes to lure him away from the firm to concentrate on managing her late husband's estate.

Local priest -- Father Josef, of L'Eglise du Marais. Angelique is careful to make

an appearance at Mass regularly, to make the appearance of devotion. She likes Father Josef, who seems not to mind the constant usurpation of his place by clerics of nobler birth, such as Jean-Paul's friend, the Bishop de Rohan, who married Angelique and baptised Christophe.

CORRESPONDENTS

Genevieve de Beauclaire -- Angelique's favorite sister, a widow who lives near Kernevalet.

Olivier de Montfleur and **Magdalene de Kercado**--Angelique's parents who live at Chateau de Kernevalet in Bretagne. Her letters home emphasize little of the joys of Paris, and much of the difficulties, in order to discourage her young cousins from moving there. She speaks of the filth in the streets, the smell, the inability to walk anywhere, the noise at night, the unfriendliness and manipulative nature of the Parisian.

Edouard and Jean-Marc de Kercado -- Angelique's unmarried brothers who reside with her parents at Chateau de Kernevalet.

Davin de Kercado -- Angelique's cousin (and player-character). Angelique remembers him as a playful 12-year old with morbid tastes for activities involving frogs and lizards.

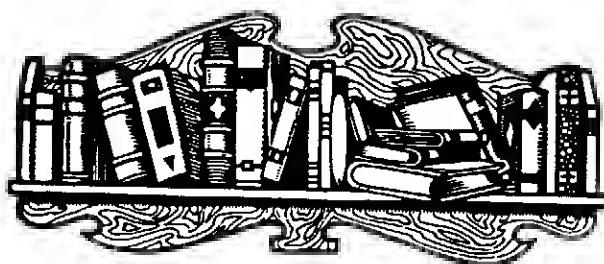
Zoe de Kercado -- Davin's twin, and Angelique's cousin (and player character). Angelique remembers her as a serious and thoughtful young girl, and was not surprised to hear from her mother Magdalene that Zoe studied the Art with her after Angelique left.

Annette Vandonne -- Angelique's married sister in Orleans, who periodically inflicts visits on Angelique. Annette is "all surfaces and no depths," as her cousin, Jean-Paul once observed.

Madame Ann-Marie de Claubert -- Robert Volange's sister, a thoroughly unpleasant woman who has made it clear that her fondest hope is that Christophe perishes before Ann-Marie does. Her lawsuit over Angelique's management of Robert's estate is still pending.

Andre Volange -- Robert Volange's disinherited son by his first wife, whose only talent seems to lie in his capacity for drinking and dueling. To Angelique's surprise, he has not brought any lawsuit to obtain his father's estate.

There are more sketches, but I think these more than suffice to convey the tone of the campaign.



NEW AND CURRENT

Magic: The Gathering card game. Our gaming group bought it at Christmas, refined our decks in January, have been swapping and buying and playing ever since. Yes, it's just as addictive as they say, although my desire to keep buying cards to add to my deck has finally tapered off as I came to my senses.

The game is simple: you lay out mana cards which you use to power attacks through spell cards, artifact cards, and magical creature cards. The loser is the first person to lose 20 life points. The variety of cards seems to be the most addictive thing about it. One local bookstore owner told me he thought printing the cards was better than printing money. He may have a point, since another bookstore now has a thriving trade in second-hand cards that it sells for as much as \$2 per card.

Some folks have speculated that it could be used as a magic system in a roleplaying game. Despite its variety, I think it would be more of a limitation than an inspiration. Nothing beats regular imagination for spells.

Schindler's List: A powerful, moving film regarding human capacity for good and evil. One might want to see this after reading ...

Jane Yolen's Briar Rose: Highly recommended retelling of the fairytale in the context of World War II. A compelling and concise novel that melds modern life and fairy tale. None of the books previously published in the fairy tale series--Steve Brust's The Sun, The Moon & The Stars, Pam Dean's Tam Lin, etc.--combined the modern and the archetypal with the sweet synchronicity that Yolen does. Everyone I've recommended this to has enjoyed it.

Nancy Kress's Beggars in Spain: An enjoyable look at the dilemmas created when gene modification is used to create "The Sleepless"--children who have no need to sleep. Beggars is a thought

provoking look at talent, prejudice, and societal obligations.

Kim Stanley Robinson's Red Mars: The great climax is outweighed--literally-- by the sheer length and boredom of the 500 or so pages preceding it. Others have commented that they think Robinson's detail is very realistic. Maybe. But for me, realism isn't always good drama or good gaming. Which would you rather watch, L.A. Law, or a lawyer doing an hour's worth of antitrust research? One is more realistic, but it certainly isn't entertaining.

Robert Jordan's endless fantasy novels: Dull. We are plagued by a shortage of good editors, or authors willing to take their advice. Still, those who skim lightly through Jordan's books will find some interesting ideas on gender, magic and culture, if they can skip the unoriginal plot where the Hero struggles to master his powers in time to defeat--surprise--the DARK ONE.

Connie Lockhart Ellefson's The Melting Pot Book of Baby Names: Essential for any gamer. While its Gaelic and Welsh name lists aren't as long as the ones I researched several years ago, it's been very useful for producing a variety of Arab, Spanish and French names on demand, each list divided by gender. Other favorites include the lists of Basque and Afghani names.

COMMENTS

Peter Maranci: Congratulations on your first apa! May you edit many more!

The Skeleton Key



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March 1994

#8

VIRTUAL TEXTUALITY

Along the wall is a strange tapestry. Somehow attached to the wall, the forms and colors within swirl and change, amorphous and hypnotizing. Violent dark reds transmute to sapphire blue, and sharp ourls form silhouettes of mountains and plains before melting away again. Half formed faces, orange sunrises and deep emerald green sunsets roll in the cloth, a surreal mix of images and dreams. It casts a shifting luminescence over the room like an echo of ancient passion. On the other wall, a hologram flutters. A blood red six-pointed atar with the two longest points forming a diagonal line. Against the black triangular banner it stands out stark and bright.

The emblem of the Ganthn
Axia.

-Nem's
Room

I can say that I never really thought much about the potential of written medium for role-playing until I began running a PBM. At the time when I started it in October, I was looking forward to gaming within the co-op, but that hadn't materialized yet as result of the normal collegiate chaos. Now, literally hundreds of pages later, I realize that I have stumbled upon something that can be every bit as enjoyable as FTF gaming. Gathering five friends from around the globe, I set the PBM in motion, wondering what would happen a few months down the road. The result is a uniquely fascinating and perfectly documented ongoing game, complete with intrigue, romance, and danger. It occurred to me that others might be interesting in hearing of it, not as in the campaign itself, but of the components that serve to bring it together or push it apart, observations on what I call virtual textuality: the creating of interactive discourse in an electronic medium, combining real-time conversation and carefully worded description in a single format.

Interactivity itself is the heart of role-playing. Without other people there is nothing

more than a single imagination at work, fleshing out an invisible world that no one will ever see. When gamers come together, whether over the net or in person, the goal is to create an interactive environment or a shared story of sorts: the game-master orchestrating the setting and minor characters while the players control the main foci of the story. Unless the GM is the sort that runs his campaign without any input from the players (I believe that would fit Collie's Storyteller classification) it is the combined effort of all the participants that shape the form and content of the campaign. In an electronic environment, it is no different - the goal is the same, only the form differs. Instead of speech it is text, and that very difference is what begins to distinguish the PBM from FTF.

Text as a form of dis-

course, in and of itself, has certain properties. Unlike speech, it has a lasting form - either written on paper, or

encoded in the bits and bytes of a computer and displayed on a screen. It has a duration longer than the time taken to create it, for unless erased or destroyed, it endures unlike the ephemeral spoken word, and can be read again and again. It is a static medium in the same way as recorded speech - it exists somewhere and can be altered, added to or erased, whereas past speech only lives on in the fragile house of memory.

It is this form and duration that alters the PBM. Each of the players, myself included, has their own distinct style of communicating. I'd be willing to bet that I could identify the author of an unnamed piece of electronic-mail from each of the players simply by my familiarity with their everyday style (assuming that all other obvious info like signatures and headers were deleted). But one thing remains constant. The duration of text, the fact that a player sending a post to me has a chance to read over his or her post and work the wording to their liking, is crucial. Unreasoned hastily written text can be as extemporaneous as speech, but the fact that the

recipient only sees the final product, the created text, means that the writer has far more control over the nature of the discourse.

What consequences does this have for PBM in general? I believe it often entices players to greater heights of description to compensate for the lack of physical community. I say often rather than always, since the varying styles of player writing ranges from the descriptive to the obscure. However the fact remains that I can ask for further description if something is unclear - and later retroactively write that into the very text of the original. This description reaches past the simple overlays possible in spoken speech. Each player focuses on certain aspects of their characters personality, carefully shaping how their character is seen by others in the game. Posts including such minor but crucial details such as eye color, facial expression or movement, and even dandruff, construct the paragraphs of text that form their character and its contribution to the interactive game setting. In a FTF game, it is quite possible that the game-master is a master of description - but unless he reads from prepared notes, his descriptions are limited by memory, and the attention span of the players. Once said, it is unlikely the same thing will be described exactly in the same way again. Text stays, and can be read over, slowly, one bit at a time. In the same way that authors in books labor over the descriptions of important people, places and scenes, the players and I can do likewise, secure that the posts

are physical things, that can be re-read, altered, and thought over.

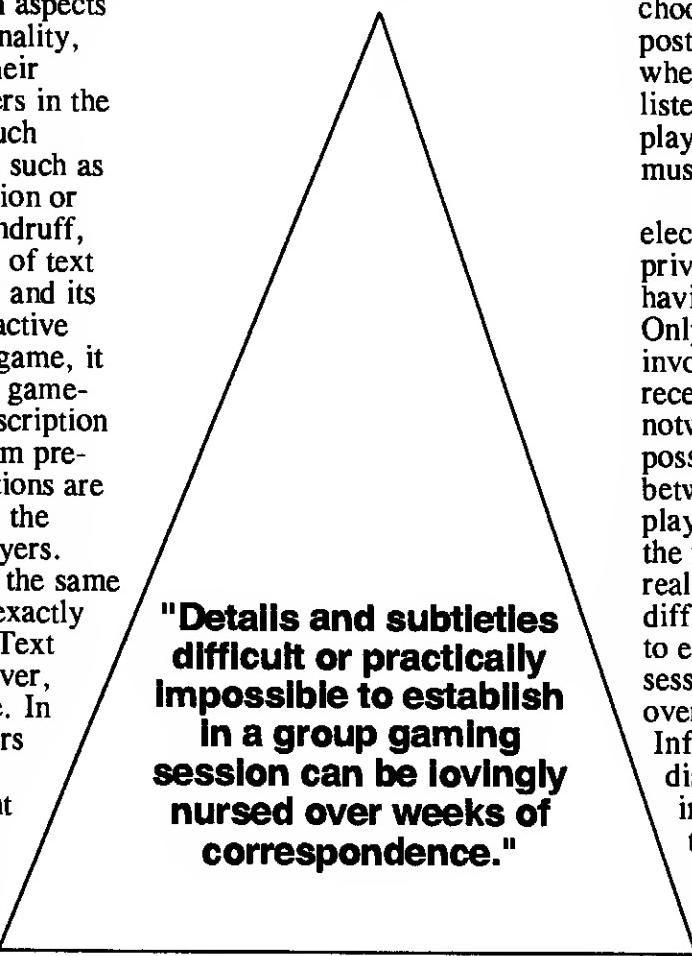
The next consideration is the electronic medium itself. This game has been conducted primarily though e-mail, with a significant secondary conduct through IRC (Internet Relay Chat). The structure that each medium imposes affects the nature of the game in a few fundamental ways.

Electronic-mail is fast - but not instant. It is still text, can be saved, erased, or altered. The very fact that the text of the game is created and sent to an analogue of the physical mailbox, the electronic account which a person checks at their convenience throughout a given

period of time, means that time passes.

This is the greatest disadvantage of PBM. While there is no set "time" to play, the response time of the players is dictated by their schedules and mine, and the frequency with which we are all able to check our electronic mail. As Pete once observed, FTF is often much faster. I agree, but that does not make PBM any less enjoyable, merely a longer continuous time investment, rather than a discrete reoccurring one (regular gaming sessions). It is this altered time investment which allows the players more freedom with description. They can spend as much time - or as little on it as they wish. If other players choose not to read all of a certain post, they can do so easily, whereas someone who has to listen to the GM (or another player) drone on with description must wait until he or she is done.

The second element of electronic mail is the inherent privacy of the players each having their own mail account. Only those players who are involved in a respective incident receive posts about it (accidents notwithstanding) and it is easily possible to hold a conversation between two players or gm and player that would bore the rest of the party were it to take place in real-time. Details and subtleties difficult or practically impossible to establish in a group gaming session can be lovingly nursed over weeks of correspondence. Information can be selectively distributed. The flipside to this increased level of realism in the game is work. Work to remember what was sent to whom, and who knows what. Fortunately, carbon-



"Details and subtleties difficult or practically impossible to establish in a group gaming session can be lovingly nursed over weeks of correspondence."

copies of all posts I send helps me keep on top of things. It is the electronic equivalent of notes in the hall, secret handouts or hidden conversations.

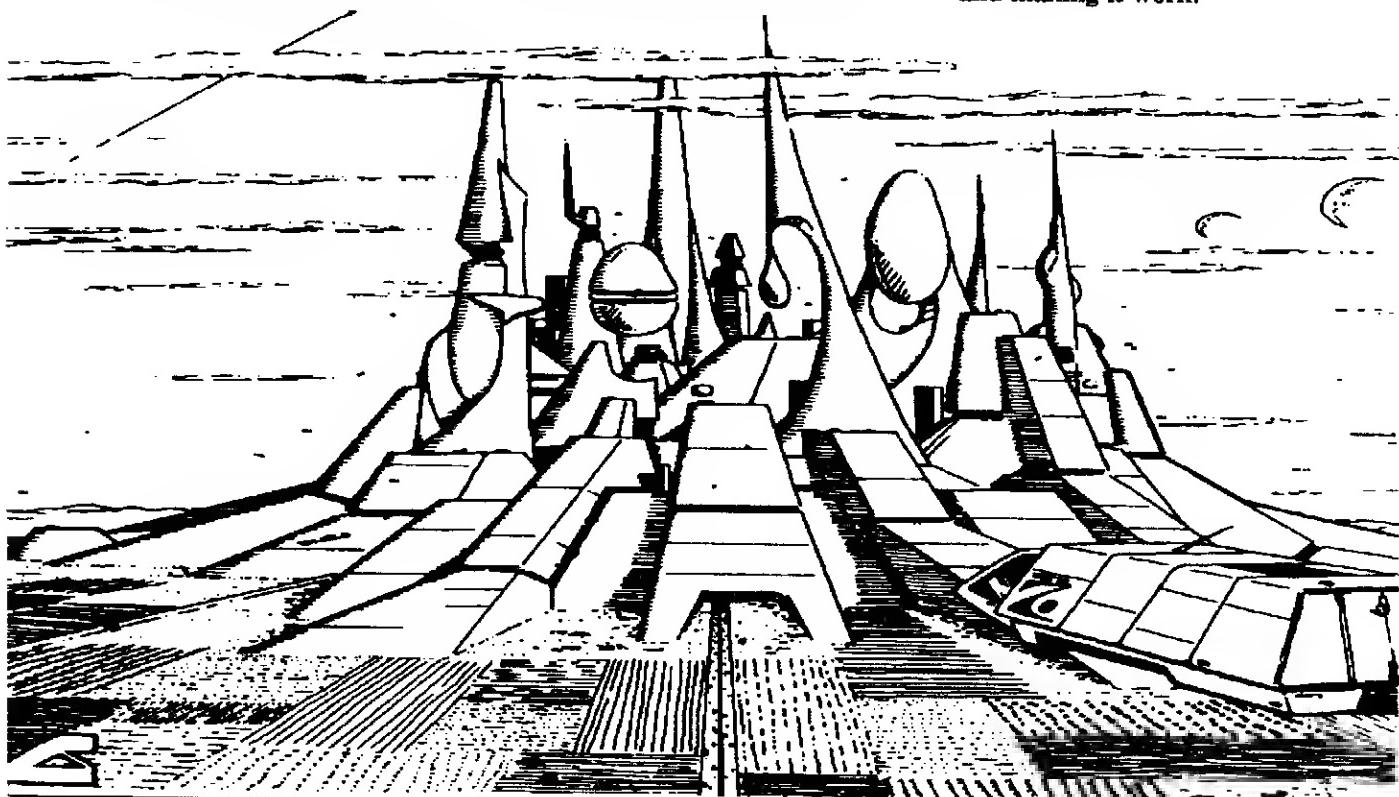
The secondary medium for this PBM has been IRC, the real-time Internet Relay Chat, where multiples of people can all be conversing at once. I note it as a secondary medium because not everyone has the access or the time to devote to real-time conversations between characters. Primarily used as a one-on-one or two-to one (two players and myself) medium in my game, IRC has developed another facet of the campaign that unfortunately not all the players can share. The ability to have real-time conversations with the players creates long stretches of dialogue that help flesh out the characters represented therein. Since it is real-time, it shares a

part of the dynamic nature of speech. Unless recorded (which I make sure to do) it passes off the screen, lasting only until it scrolls past, into the electronic wilderness.

The real-time nature of IRC makes it more a medium for discussion than description, though two people working closely together can interleave description with dialogue, and that for the most part is what we do: IRC as a dynamic medium gives those who have access a chance to develop their characters in pages of dynamic discourse that flows as easily as speech. It isn't uncommon to have up to fifteen pages created in a single session, the creative productive effort of the players and myself. It ends up reading like a single collaborative effort, rather than an artful patchwork of multiple posts, which even

when done well, lacks the innate fluidity of real-time dialogue.

Unlike FTF, the PBM has seams: until someone sits down (me or any of my helpful players) and edits the long pastiche of electronic mail posts together into a single whole, the obvious nature of our constructed world always shows. The multiplicity of writing styles, the constraints and advantages of electronic mail and the nature of textual discourse all converge to create an interesting and worthwhile gaming pursuit. The slowness of the PBM can be discouraging: but I believe that done well, it offers a fascinating and memorable format for interactive roleplaying across boundaries of time and place. Thanks to Carla Schack, Collie Collier, Mark Bailey, Phil Nadeau, Walter Milliken and Elizabeth McCoy for getting it off the ground and making it work.



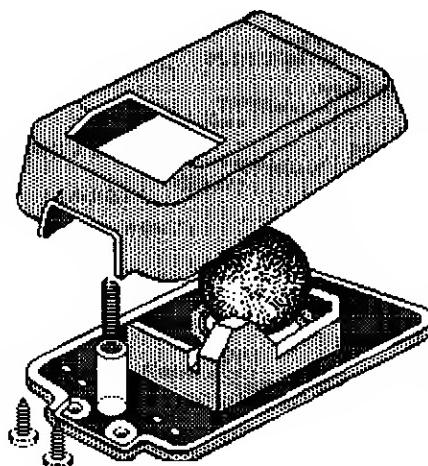
~~ANOTHER SEMESTER ANOTHER CAMPAIGN~~

NOTES FROM THE EDGE

I started with the intention of running a month long cyberpunk campaign. It ran for four. A few interesting kinks in the structure of the game developed as we went along. One of the players was an undercover cop, and no one discovered this until the final session. One of the players played a soldier who had literally sold himself to the corporation he worked for. They rebuilt him into the perfect killing machine, with a few strings built in, naturally. He died during the last session, forced to turn on his former partner, the undercover cop. Unfair? Maybe. But the player knew the risks from the beginning, and decided to shoot for it. Literally.

One of the players, a first time cyberpunker, quit. When I asked her why, she told me bluntly, "All the characters are jerks of one sort or another." Now I knew it couldn't have been a conflict with the other players: the next game is being run by one of the players in my game, and everyone else is the same. She just didn't like the moral ambiguity. Looking for intraparty cooperation, and a fight against evil, she found herself embroiled in constant intrigue, mistrust, and facing the possibility that there were many sides to the conflict. I could understand that: the ethos of the

"gritty realism" school of gaming is diametrically opposed to the old saw "here we gather, and quest forth to smite evil!" Many of the characters had hard edges: they were killers, liars, and thieves, but not without soul: The techie became a foster-parent to a wary streetkid. The



solo's secret was his kid sister, the only person that kept him from sliding into madness. The nomad scoured the city for any hint of a disappeared friend. The slick corporate was actually an undercover cop, dedicated to solving the death of one good cop on the dark streets of the West Harbor District. 4 months was too short to see much character development but almost every player started out with a character concept that was fleshed out during play. We counted up the game-days at the end of the campaign. Two weeks.

The cyberpunk genre is a fast paced, information heavy, distorted mirror of the real world, a mixture of fears and fantasy projected into the future. So much happened during each game-day, jumping from character to character, that everyone had a chance to do something. The party had fragmented along class lines: the working techie, and the homeless nomad sticking with the reporter, and the corporate and the solo covering the high end of the city. An almost perfect reflection of their schizoid world, and the atomization of the post-industrial age. The artificial structure of the gaming group ebbed and flowed with the goals of the characters, and I jumped back and forth from subgroup to subgroup, one playing, one scheming. By the end of the game, my players had a folder thick with papers, plastered with yellow sticky notes used to simulate electronic mail, secret phone calls, and hidden resources.

The ending of the campaign was exhilarating, and we were up til 3am the day before Spring Break. One of the players wrote up the campaign as a treatment for his film class. Now we prepare to move from the murky world of cyberpunk to the brighter shinier world of the superhero. Maybe it will do something to alter my attitude towards superhero games. Maybe not.

ANOTHER SEMESTER ANOTHER CAMPAIGN

QUOTES FROM THE EDGE

"I don't know if it is arrogance or paranoia to bug your own bedroom."

- Fritz, a techie, wondering just how paranoid Trent the suit really is.

"Talk to me Holson! I'm here for you!"

- Trent to his cold-fish bodyguard Holson.

"Why not just paste a sign on me that says 'You missed, try again?'"

- Fritz after hearing a plan to use him as bait for some assassins.

"I hate being a hardass - wait, no, I love being a hardass."

- Trent, correcting himself.

"Go watch the car - just try not to look like you're stealing it."

- Trent to Carlos, a nomad.

"You might not want to walk about barefoot, as plot hooks seem to be littering the landscape."

- Perry, Trent's player, in an aside to another player.

"You want us to walk in there, pull guns, and get mowed down by your own security forces?"

"Well, yeah."

- conversation between Carlos and Trent, after hearing a plan of Trent's to infiltrate his own company.

WHO IS JOHN GALT? #1

Looters beware!

Curtis Taylor, P. O. Box 1144, Ontario, CA 91762-0144/(909) 985-3355/vinkot@aol.com

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BACKGROUND

I was born on October 27, 1966 in Upland, CA and am currently living in the same city. I graduated from Upland High School in 1985 and enlisted in the United States Navy in August of that same year. I spent most of my time in the Navy not on a ship, but at Naval schools either being instructed or instructing the theory, operation, and maintenance of nuclear reactors. I concluded my active duty in the U. S. Navy in August of 1991.

I currently work as a Power Plant Operator for the City of Burbank. I work a rotating shift which includes a couple of night shifts per week. I have a strange sleep schedule since this work schedule causes me to sleep during the daytime a couple of days per week.

I began my role-playing experience in 1979 with Melee and Wizard. Soon after I was playing D&D. A year or two later I enjoyed the discovery of some "new" games: Traveller, Champions, and RuneQuest. Sure, there were other games I played or ran that were good, but at the time, these were the best. I think the last game that came out at that time that I still enjoy is Call of Cthulhu. Thanks, Sandy!

I currently contribute to two other APA's: *The Wild Hunt* and *Alarms & Excursions (A&E)*. I mostly write about RuneQuest and Glorantha, but am open to just about any of the older game systems and board games.

NEW CHARACTERS

In order to play an RPG, you will need to have players and their PCs. Players like to create their own characters, but often do not flesh out their creations as full as you, the GM, would like. Some games lend themselves to developing the character background more

fully than others, such as GURPS and the *Hero* system. Without the GM being involved, the player can create a PC who has a fairly detailed background, with many of his past experiences coming out to haunt him during play. But this is at the whim of the player, and a player who does not fully use the capabilities of the system may not provide a developed PC. This requires you, the poor GM, to put flesh onto the bones of the PC your player has created.

Below are a sample of questions that I ask the players to fill out prior to play concerning their new characters. This should help them flesh out their own characters.

1. Tell me about your first pet.
2. How were you first exposed to death?
3. What is the farthest you have been away from home?
4. What are your parents doing now?
5. Why are you in this city?

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Last year I was involved in a GURPS game that was run by my best friend. I was running a druid-type character and was not satisfied with the spells offered for such a character. Below is contained some of the spells I developed for this character. CAUTION: these spells have not been extensively play tested and definitely not compared to anything in GURPS Grimoire! Use at your own risk!

Hibernation

Regular; Resisted by HT

This spell maintains the subject asleep for a period of $26 + 1d6$ days. The subject requires air, but not food. The subject can still be harmed by fire, weapons, and other natural or magical hazards. The subject can be awakened by a blow, loud noise, etc., but will be mentally

REFUGEE # 186

George Phillies
 87-6 Park Avenue
 Worcester MA 01609
 508-754-1859(h,a)
 508-831-5334(o)
 Internet:phillies@wpi.wpi.edu At any hour, try o first.

The contents of this zine include are all fiction. They will include *Communications* Letters to the Editor, in which I publish letters or comments from correspondents, if by some chance I ever receive any. If you are not a regular writer, and have remarks on REFUGEE or the rest of the Hunt, send them to me at the above address. I will print at my expense what I find interesting.

Fiction

For the record, I have a complete first draft, ready disc shipping to interested parties.

A character synopsis:

The Greater Medford and Suburbs Persona League consists of three siblings, Trishaset Jessamine ("Trisha") aka Comet, Brian Sean aka Star, and Jane Carolyn ("Janie") aka Aurora. Their good friend, nominal leader of the Greater Medford Four, is Chester Theodore aka Cloud. Their strange friend is Eclipse who never tells anyone that her true given name is Gloriana ("Glory"). The five are personae, people who have received gifts allowing them to fly, break things, read minds, and other such deeds of potential virtue. Alexander Humboldt von Pickering is the world's greatest scientist (he says). Comet, Cloud, and Eclipse are 12; Star and Aurora are within a month of their 11th birthday.

PICKERING AND THE ARCH OF TIME How It All Ends

Janie's bedroom was at the clean end of its normal range, which was to say that the outlines of a desk and other furniture could intermittently be discerned between her collection of stuffed animals, books, *Encyclopedias of Chess Openings*, a stack of Korean- and Manjukuan-language newspapers in which alternated obscure characters and outlines of Stones and Shogi boards, and her half-read set of D'Andrea's definitive *Strategies of the Great Boardgame: Opening Lines in City of Steel*. The more observant visitor would note that for all the apparent disorder the room was scrupulously clean, clothes neatly put away, scraps of paper safe in the wastepaper basket.

Janie's mother, finding a visitor in her younger daughter's room, would remark defensively that her daughter bought chess and go books out of winnings from various junior competitions, and that the larger part of her daughter's earnings were safely set away for her college expenses.

Trisha pushed the door shut behind her. The slightest flicker of Janie's talents confirmed that parents and brother were not in earshot. What had Janie wanted to tell her, absolutely as soon as possible?

"I met Starsong again," Janie explained. "He was a bit surprised to meet me, not Aurora. But I told him why, why not Aurora, and he understood. He said the sky octopusses are gone, that we're heroes if we want. I told him we don't. I think he understood. So we talked."

"Is he still hot on the Namestone?" asked a worried Trisha. "He might want us to help."

"He is," answered Janie. "I told him it was no deal, we wouldn't help him trick it out of Eclipse. He didn't believe she'd smashed it. I told him Eclipse told the League of Nations where Utopia was. Resting on their desks, right in front of them. Attached to their wrists, even. He was real surprised to hear me say that. Funny thing is, I think he agreed with Eclipse all along, about how you get Utopia. He's really sensible. But Starsong said FedCorps is sure to get Eclipse. He was positive. He said they were sure because of the fact that people with high-power gifts, when they start growing up, gifts get confused. Well, that's what he said. I never heard that before. Except there aren't lots of personas who aren't grown up, so maybe I wouldn't know. So in a year, you should maybe be careful about flying fast. Though he thought you'd be okay, 'cause you really do one thing, and do it so incredibly good.' Trisha blushed at Starsong's compliment.

"Gifts get confused?" Trisha was baffled.

"Starsong warned, a couple years from now, Brian and me should be careful. Because if we call on our gifts hard, we have lots of different ones, and they could get mixed up. When you grow up, for a while, your gifts go wrong. You call and get the wrong one. And we could get hurt. Like Brian could fry himself with his shields." Aurora sat back on her bed.

"So why does that mean they'll get Eclipse?" asked Trisha. "Oh, right, she has more different gifts than absolutely anyone I've ever heard of in my whole life except maybe Corinne or Solara, and she calls on them harder than most anyone, so she's almost as fast as me, and almost as good at mentalics as you, and lots of other things."

"That's why, he said, they were sure to catch Eclipse. This year, next year, the year after, her powers go wrong.

All of them. Real badly. And the harder she calls, the more wrong they'll go. So they'll find her. And she won't be able to fight back. And if she tries, her gifts betray her." Janie saw the horrified look in Trisha's eyes. "Except it won't work. I knew it all along. But I didn't know, what I knew meant."

"Why won't it work? That's absolutely awful that they can just wait and poor Eclipse won't be able to do anything except surrender or blow herself up or something gross; do you think maybe we could hide her, someplace they won't think to look? Our, no, mom would eventually notice if we hid someone in the attic, wouldn't she?" Trisha tried to envision how they could rescue their friend.

"Don't need to," answered Janie. "Eclipse knew all the time. Though I think they're wrong. She's absolutely real good at everything. Like you're real good at flying, she's just good. So maybe she'll stay good enough? It doesn't matter. Back when we were with Alex? He told us Adara's tale about the octopi."

"That's what the Eye promised. And he promised we'd be big heroes, if we wanted, except when we got home we didn't want anything like that, so only us four and Colonel Bowie know exactly how the world got saved from the horrodrin," Trisha could smile, a golden glow of pride relaxing her.

"Adara didn't have gifts," said Janie. "But her magic, it was like gifts. So she had force field and teleport and other real neat stuff. Alex didn't understand what she said. But he remembered. And Eclipse understood something. Something Alex remembered and didn't understand. Like he didn't know he knew it, even when he was telling it. Enough to show Eclipse and me how to beat octopi, from seeing what Adara did. Except when I was helping Alex tell Adara's tale, there was twice when Eclipse went 'Aha!' Once was how you hurt an octopus that's trying to hide. Of course, Eclipse was looking at Runes, so she didn't see the right answer as the answer, but she went 'Aha!' then." Janie paused for another sip of birch beer. How could a world as wonderful as Pickering's have forgotten it? — so all they had was sickly-sweet sarsaparilla — root beer, he'd called it.

"Sure, we all knew it was important. And Eclipse knew, and you knew. You can't hurt octopi because they're on another plane, so your attack's gotta go sideways, and Eclipse learned where sideways is from Victoria, not just from Alex," said Trisha, sticking up for Victoria, a friend she would never see again.

"But the other time. Adara explained why she's our age. When she's older than anyone. It wasn't a gift, but it was real like self-healing. So Eclipse saw 'zactly how to do it. That was her other 'Aha!'" Janie remembered how sharply Eclipse had fastened onto those memories, how puzzled she'd been at Eclipse's interest in being old and

young at once, when Eclipse was obviously only young, so obviously young that even Cloud could tell she was young. "And now she's gonna do it to herself. So she doesn't get any older. Or doesn't get old for a while. Copy Adara."

"Why?" wondered Comet. "Oh! So she doesn't grow up. So her powers never get mixed up! So she never gets caught. Even, like, so she never has to put up with boys and romantic silliness. That's wonderful!" Trisha sagged, limp with relief that another friend had beaten the odds. "And there's another escape, too. I mean, if she's always twelve she's always gonna look twelve and in five years everyone will know she's seventeen and stop looking for a twelve-year-old girl, so she could almost put on a school uniform and walk through the Geneva Peace Palace and none of those politicians would even notice that their worst enemy is standing right in front of them, between them and the nearest force field. But wait, you were mind-to-mind with Starsong, won't he figure all this out from you now?"

"He doesn't know. He asked if we learned anything else useful. Other than octopusses. Like anything about Eclipse. He'd already said how they'd catch Eclipse, and I'd figured out the age trick, and how great it would be for Eclipse. But I said no. I told him we learned about the sky octopusses, and she learned about sky octopusses, but we learned nothing about Eclipse. I've never lied before," confessed Janie guiltily. "Not mind to mind. I didn't know you could. Especially not to someone who's been real nice to me. But I did."

Trisha wished she had some way to console her sister. "But you did it for someone who's not being treated fair at all; we know why Eclipse did — everything she did — and why she's absolutely positively completely right, even if the League of Nations and FedCorps and even our own twit brother will never ever listen to us telling them so, because we're just twelve and ten and all their computers prove she was wrong, and maybe it's something wrong with computers that they get boys to do whatever they're told to do by a computer, just because there's a number for a reason why."

"It still didn't feel right. Nothing's felt right. Not since we went to see the Eye. Not since we flew across the universe," lamented Janie. "I don't want to do a public persona again. Not now. Not soon. Not ever. I told Starsong that. We made the sky octopusses go away. Ourselves. That's enough. At least until we grow up."

"I hear you, sister," answered Trisha. "But I really like to go cloud diving. Over the ocean, in the twilight, when clouds are big slabs of salmon and pink and purple and tangerine so dropping through one is like falling through colored smoke except you don't smell anything burning? Maybe if I don't tell anyone, except you? I'll take you, if you want."

"Frigit!" answered Janie gleefully. "You could ask Brian too, but he won't go. He's got his new club. With the guys down the street."

"Club?" asked Trisha.

"Yeah, club. The Boy's Block Baseball Club. With four rules," answered Janie. "Rule one: play or talk baseball. Rule two: keep the clubhouse clean. (Hey! He's learned something from us. Neatness.)" Comet dubiously contemplated the outlines of Janie's room, sometimes visible between the books and magazines. "Rule three: No Girls! Rule four: See Rule Three!" Janie smirked.

Trisha shook her head, sending copper curls cascading across her shoulders. "Boys! Brains like posts!"

* * * * *

Manhattan. The Malcolm X - Martin Luther King Parks, relocated and rebuilt on a grander scale after the devastation of the Lemurian invasion, were a twinned series of rolling stairs, fountains, and gardens. Children played; tourists took photographs. Who could be surprised to see Starsong, alias Wilbur Theodore Roosevelt McLeod, the Republic's most famous Black persona, walking along an isolated terrace, another Black persona — masked, caped, obviously far younger than the silver-haired Starsong whose earliest heroics dated to the First World War — at his side.

So, Cloud, asked Starsong, *you'll be giving up your public persona for a time?*

Well, mostly, answered the still-doubtful Cloud. *Unless it's a real real emergency. I'm not a quitter, not like the rest of my old gang. But didn't I do enough for one year? We [mental image of the Fearsome Four, Eclipse to one side] made the hrordrin go away. I can even say Eclipse helped, without choking. I can even say she beat my trap, when I thought I had her trapped for good in that other world, and not get sore about it. Except I don't believe that even a girl, even Eclipse, is dumb enough to smash the Namestone. But she's smart enough to tell you that, hoping you'll all quit chasing her.*

You did enough for one year. You did enough for one life! Starsong's assent was sharp and clear. *You taking her like that, she being as powerful as she is? That's real heroism, really being true to your gifts! There'll always be a few people who complain you jumped her, she being with you, but you did the right thing.*

*The only part I'm sad about is Comet and Aurora being mad at me, and me not being able to explain. Not without me saying I tricked them. I decked Eclipse, enough that she couldn't talk back. So I could trick Comet into leaving Eclipse behind. I said I was going to kill Eclipse, if Comet didn't leave her behind, and Comet believed me. So she

left Eclipse back there to save Eclipse's life. Lucky for me Comet didn't call my bluff,* he added.

Your bluff? echoed Starsong.

Me? Kill Eclipse? No way. She has defenses inside defenses inside defenses. I stunned her, enough I could do all the talking and take Comet and Aurora by surprise, but I just know Eclipse has presets. If I'd actually tried to kill her, even when she was down, she'd just have teleported out, or done something violent, wide-area, something that maybe wouldn't hurt me but would've killed Comet for sure. So I shut Eclipse up and faked Comet into dumping her. And I can't ever tell Comet that. She won't even talk to me, already, explained Cloud.

Starsong looked thoughtful. *I see. You hoped, you'd trap Eclipse over there, where she couldn't hurt the world any more. Your plan was clever. Subtle. Deep. Of course, if you'd made your swing at Eclipse, and been wrong about her shields being down, she might have smiled ... and completely leveled you. Crisped you to charcoal. You put your life in the breach.*

I know. I know. I was sure my plan would fail. And then I'd die. She'd blow me to atoms. I had to do it, take the chance I'd die and Eclipse would get away. And I half failed, Cloud looked downcast.

You had a draw, answered Starsong. *A draw against a gamesmistress, that's good. And she's a master of games, some ways, no doubt. You aren't hurt. You trapped her for a week. That's better than the French Persona Corps did.* Cloud nodded his head. And we'll get Eclipse,* Starsong continued. *I told you why. After all, another year or two, you'll have to watch that, too. I'll believe getting the Namestone when I've got it in my hands. I don't care what Colonel Bowie says, Eclipse is one sharp cookie, no matter how dumb-headed she is about the Namestone. If she hid it, it's gone for a time.*

But the men here, Cloud pointed at statues of the two martyrs, facing each other across a wide avenue, dark granite edges fresh as their cutting a year ago, *they weren't personas. They were ungifted. And look what they did with their lives. So, that's why I asked we meet here. Inspiration. I need to be more of me, not just be garb wrapped around my gifts.*

That's the most important thing you learned on your trip, no doubt, offered Starsong. *Too many personas, they're a flash of spandex and some tricks with smoke and light and mirrors, and no memory at all they're people.* He paused, admiring the two statues, which had been carved and polished in a single afternoon by a nameless persona working from artist's models. *But don't you be saying, don't being saying, those two were ungifted. They may not have had gifts, but they had the Gift, the one they made for themselves with their own wits and

courage.*

Yes, sir. But 'made for themselves'? I heard Eclipse say that. Heard her tell the League that. remembered Cloud.

So did a lot of folk. Probably one and a half billion. A few of those folks, they even listened. Not enough, though. He looked seriously at the younger persona.

And if Eclipse said it, well, when the Devil offers you good advice, Cloud, and you know it's good advice, don't be turning the advice down, only because it's the Devil offering it.

Yes, sir. agreed Cloud.

And now it's time you were back to the scenic city of Roxbury, isn't it? asked Starsong. The boy nodded agreement. A cascade of rainbows, a shower of pastel sparks. Pigeons scattered into the park's early spring air. The two personae were gone, vanished from the terrace as though they had never been.

* * * * *

Eclipse hovered among pine trees, her toes not quite touching the ground, every sense operating at full stretch. The day was brilliantly clear, sky an impossibly deep blue, snow on distant mountains burning white. There was her home, rutted driveway leading from garage toward an ill-maintained gravel county road, a well-worn path stretching from house to barn. None of the burglar alarms had been triggered. More passive mechanical traps, hidden snares to warn her if there'd been intruders, were equally undisturbed.

An inpouring of cerulean light, a chorus of lonely bells. She stood in her own kitchen, every surface sparkling clean, white-painted woodwork gathering the sunlight that poured through gingham-curtained windows. The room brought to her nostrils the faintest overlay of cinnamon and cocoa.

A lightning tour of the house showed all was in order. Propane and oil tanks were nearly full; a few minutes restarted the flash water heater and reset the house heat from unoccupied to occupied level. Her bedroom, wood-panelled, queen-size bed and neat black-and-white quilts, black and grey checkerboard carpets, solid oak dresser and chair, mahogany vanity table, were all as meticulously neat and clean as when she'd left them a week ago. The sheaf of wheat, spreading out from a cream-white ceramic vase, had collected a spider web. A furry stuffed cat, the one fragment she'd saved from the home in which she'd grown up, hung from the bedboards. She remembered the day before she left for Mars, spending hours and hours cleaning house, telling herself work before she left meant tranquility on return. She'd been right. Doors and windows were closed; a lavender sachet had saturated the

room with its delicate scent. Large windows with frilly country drapes faced west and north, revealing acres and acres of well-fenced pastureland.

Her study and library, boards for built-in bookshelves cut to length and freshly stained, desk with Tempest-class computer and stacks of schoolbooks and CD-ROMs and self-study discs, reminded her of what she had not been doing these past weeks. She told herself she'd have plenty of time now. She was totally worn down. For the next month, serious use of her gifts was strictly for saving her own life. She might teleport to the barn, but someone else would have to save the world. The thought of studying reminded her of home — her real home, the one she'd had to leave, the one in which Mom had always been there when she'd been needed, whether it was words of praise, a little firm encouragement to do what she knew she was supposed to do, or just the right question so she'd figure out everything for herself. No matter. That was over, and she knew in her head that it must be best for her. Even if she didn't know why. Sometimes her heart even agreed.

Other rooms were carpeted and draped, but virtually bare of furniture. A faked parental bedroom would convince prying eyes that her parents lived here, too; she had to remember to keep that room clean even though she never used it. A few lamps and chairs, positioned before windows, were arranged to fool prying strangers. One rocking chair sat by the front picture window; the rolled hammock in the front closet waited for warmer spring. She remembered the Fearsome Four's estimate of her base: hardened steel armor, atomic force-screen generators, subterranean caverns filled with scientific equipment, the — no, Star had not been pulling her leg — the radar-controlled nuclear-shelled sixteen-inch-guns — and burst into laughter. She had to laugh; the alternative was to cry.

Armor plate? Well, there was a new roof. Reroofing had been gruelling hard work. Marks on the attic roof said it was mandatory. The wood underneath was still mostly sound, but the roofing was too old. Fine-control telekinesis did mean she could literally strip the shingles from an entire roof, every nail pulled out by its roots, in a single burst of concentration. Foresight had been the recognition that if you tore off the roof all at once, you had to replace every bit of it before the next rain, a real gamble late last fall. Repairing the roof a section at a time, replacing rotted wood with new boards, laying down and sealing the felting, cutting flashing and asphalt tiles and dragging them into place, and nailing the whole thing down, securely enough that the first good wind wouldn't destroy her work — that had been hard-earned experience and exhausting muscle work. Only after several days of hammering had she figured out how fine telekinesis could drive masses of nails effectively. A realization that exhausting muscle work was now only hard muscle work, that rolls of roofing felt could be moved with a dedicated

heave of shoulders and back and legs, rather than the burst of telekinetic energy she barely dared risk using, showed that muscle work had consequences. Those consequences had paid off in the Maze, when traps set to an anticipation of an ungifted child's strength and endurance failed to close properly around her.

In the months since, working in moments stolen from studying, stolen from her ponies, stolen from her duty to her gifts, she'd managed to refurbish and decorate two rooms and part of a third. She loved the rooms, but they were a far cry from Star's Fortress of Evanescence Darkness. And that much progress had been possible only because the last owner had replaced all the utilities, so wiring, plumbing, solar heat assists, and hot-water heat were all in good order.

Bathing — the hot water tank would need a while to refill and reheat — seemed most in order. Then she could go to bed. Her carryall went in a bedroom corner; the reserve crash kit went by her bed. She changed clothes, replacing moon-gray garb with sneakers, corduroy pants, largish brightly-checked shirt, oversize felted jacket, and floppy straw hat. Raiding the kitchen filled jacket pockets.

A sapphire shimmer, the cheery ringing of a church calling countryfolk to a wedding. Eclipse stood in the loft of her three-walled barn. The fourth wall, facing downwind, remained over its center half open to the elements. Dry cat food in the automatic feeder was somewhat depleted, neat lines of tails showing where Gwendolyn had been busy among the rodent population. A tin of tuna fish went down besides the tails. Gwendolyn was not in sight. A weave of straw and shredded cloth with cat-sized opening marked her usual sleeping place.

Eclipse dropped hand-over-hand down a pipe. The horses were outside. That was for the best, she told herself. They expected to have the barn mucked out regularly, but found the slight glimmer and crackle of telekinetic energy disheartening. Of course, she could muck the stalls with a shovel and barrow, so she wouldn't frighten them, at a dozenfold the time investment — not to mention what she'd smell like afterwards. No, some sacrifices were not worth their price. A whorl of light struck at the barn floor, primly collecting hay, road apples, and miscellaneous material into a neat pile that floated itself out the side door into a distant manure pile. She still took the time needed to refill by hand the feed bins with hay and barley, and to put back and shoulders into spreading the now-clean floor with straw and wood chips.

She was so intent on her barnyard chores that she almost missed the clop of hooves behind her. A friendly nudge across her back sent her staggering. She whirled, caught the pony around the neck, and hugged it tight. "Daffodil! Oh, Daffodil! I've so missed you!" The Appaloosa nickered gently, delighted at the return of its mistress. A

second clatter of feet was followed by the press of damp, oversize lips, first across the back of her neck, then probing towards coat pockets. "Yes, Snapdragon! You, too!" She took the other pony in her arms, the first Appaloosa pressing close beside the second. For a few moments the three snuggled together. It was wonderful to be back home, back with the wonderful creatures that so completely loved her.

A horse head leaned over, poked her firmly in the stomach, then snuffled sideways, questing again for coat pockets and their unspoken treasures. "Oh, all right. Both of you." She pushed the ponies apart, enough to jam a hand into each pocket, withdrawing a pair of Golden Delicious apples. The slightest trace of concentration quartered each fruit. Palms and fingers flat, she extended the apples, which were neatly taken up, one section at a time, crunched upon, and swallowed. A further search of coat pockets produced another pair of apples, which rapidly followed the first, and two large lumps of maple sugar, all of which disappeared amid snorts of appreciation. Additional snorts greeted her attention, one horse at a time, with brush and curry comb.

Daffodil tickled the back of Eclipse's neck, took her coat collar gently between equine teeth, and tugged gently towards the open field. "You want to be ridden, don't you?" She cuddled Snapdragon, who viewed being ridden as something to be taken or left, and patted Daffodil's nose again. "Okay, okay!" The ponies held still as nylon halters went over their heads; lead lines followed. Setting one hand firmly on Daffodil's shoulders, she vaulted onto the gelding's back. Without prompting, Daffodil turned for the out-of-doors, the mare pacing a few steps behind. Eclipse felt her hair, confirming that her hat was solidly in place, its tie firmly under her chin. The math said a lucky satellite recon could pick out her hair color, at least under perfect conditions; blue-white blonde was rare enough that a hundred tons of Manjukuan gold might prompt someone to investigate. Tomorrow it was back to the hair dye.

Eclipse made the lightest of mindscans. No one else was on the property, nor in line of sight outside. Bareback riding at full gallop distracted some of her neighbors, even though the ponies had perfectly proper halters and reins. She could dispense with reins, using telepathy to show the ponies exactly what she wanted, but guiding a horse by telepathy was like arguing with a small, good-tempered child who had recently discovered the 'no' concept and sometimes liked to experiment with it. She nudged Daffodil, who responded eagerly with a canter, then, clearing the paddock, with a full-winded gallop.

Much later, two contented appaloosas and their exhausted mistress returned to the barn. The ponies scented food and forgot Eclipse, who gratefully dismounted, separated them from their harness, and headed

for home. Her clothes she hung on the bathroom door. The water was now hot enough for a shower and good bubble bath. Hair dried, wrapped in nightgown and down-filled bathrobe, she raided the refrigerator. Milk, soda bread, and roast chicken made a delightful meal; surely Daffodil and Snapdragon wouldn't begrudge her one apple? Bathed, fed, at long last secure in her own bed, Eclipse snuggled the quilt around her shoulders, tucked her head into the pillows, and fell into dreamless sleep.

The End

Commentationes

Since my Physics Department's time machine is not up and running, I can't readily comment on the previously received issue.

Session Notes #1.5
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Everything Old Is New Again

A long time ago, in a galaxy not terribly different from our own, there were three slim black books. These were the original foundation of **Traveller**, probably the most successful of all the science fiction role playing games. Over the years, it spawned any number of additional small books, adventures, board games, and other expansions. Recently, GDW decided to revamp the system and the background for the game. Hence we now have **Traveller: The New Era**, known among our group as **UltraMegaGigaTraveller: The Next Iteration.** ☺

In previous writings, I have taken GDW to task for the evolution of the original **Traveller** and many other GDW products into what I call "The Official World." **Traveller** was originally a generic sf system, but became increasingly tied to the GDW Imperium universe. As I believe that creativity and world building are some of the more appealing facets of RPG, I've never really cared for official game settings. On the other hand, I realize that a good number of refs have neither the time nor the interest to create worlds or adventures. For them, official game settings can be very attractive.

I'm very pleased to report that GDW has found the best of both worlds in **T:TNE**. They have continued the process of developing the official **Traveller** universe following the breakup of the Imperium. To add a bit of a twist to the civil war plotline, an "ultimate weapon" was released during the waning days of the conflict. This was a silicon-based lifeform capable of impressing its binary code on other forms of silicon. In certain large-memory computer systems it achieved self-awareness. Since it was originally intended to disable computer-assisted weapons, when Virus (as it is called) escaped, many of its variants engaged in homicidal or suicidal behavior. One isolated area of the former Imperium was able to close its frontiers against Virus and thus preserved a normal level of technology. Most of the former Imperium was thrown into complete technological and social chaos.

GDW has added quite a bit of campaign flexibility to **T:TNE**. Players may be based in the Regency (a small area near the Spinward Marches that retains most of Imperial technology), or in a small cluster of worlds in the former Imperium that has begun to rebuild civilization, or even in "the Wilds" -- the shattered worlds of the former high-tech Imperium, now reduced to barbarism. Along the portion of the former Imperium that bordered the Hiver Worlds, Hiver contact teams have begun an outreach/uplift program to restore the technology of human worlds devastated by Virus. This is clearly key to GDW's plans for target campaigns. The people of these worlds (dubbed "Space Vikings,"

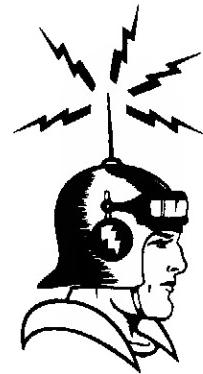
for no particular reason I can fathom) have begun to launch their own uplift missions deeper into the former Imperium.

Hypertext: Sure, it has become a virtual cliche – but it's still fun. You never know where it will pop up. ☺

Space Vikings: I just don't know about this one. I suppose it may lure 1 or 2 of your more gullible **AD&D** players into buying the game, but it doesn't really fit the rest of a well-designed setting. Unlike the real Vikings, GDW's constructs are not being driven outward by a shortage of land or food - there is plenty of land to be found in the former Imperium. Nor are the Space Vikings out to establish trade or to plunder more wealthy civilizations. While the real Vikings had some galvanizing effects on static European societies, one can scarcely argue that they came as teachers and technological advisors. Plus, for some curious reason, all the art in **T:TNE** depicts the Space Vikings in outfits that look like left-over costumes from a bad 1930s pulp sf serial. Go figure.

Strategically, this is a very adaptive campaigning environment. Players who enjoyed the social cohesion, high technology, and intricate background of the Imperium should be able to campaign in the Regency without changing their style dramatically. I doubt many people attracted to **Traveller** as a game would be keen on playing low-tech barbarians in the Wilds, but perhaps there are a few inventive souls out there. The chief thrust seems to be PCs as Space Vikings, making overt or covert missions of discovery into the ruins of the Wilds. This has a great deal of excellent role playing potential. In my experience, one factor in the Imperium setting that turned off many players was the structure of the Imperium -- with lots of law, order, and enforcement powers, it was difficult for PCs to run amuck the way they were accustomed to in more decentralized settings (**AD&D™** comes to mind for some reason ☺). I don't think it's a coincidence that GDW's campaign settings tended to gravitate to the wilder frontier regions of the Imperium before they took the step of plunging the whole empire into civil war. It seems the creative people at GDW are listening to what people want to play.

What impresses me even more than the fluid nature of the campaign setting is the first major expansion to **T:TNE**. Called **Fire, Fusion & Steel**, it provides a systematic approach to designing everything from small handguns up to star cruisers of over 1 million tonnes displacement. This in itself is extraordinarily valuable to the referee who wishes to have more than just a stock equipment list. It goes beyond being a simple toolkit, however. **FF&S** contains a number of alternative technologies quite distinct from the official Imperium universe. Starships could use psionic-based interstellar travel or stargates or "stutterwarp" rather than the familiar jump drives of the original **Traveller**. A variety of different sublight drives are included, along with alternate communications systems, sensor systems, and other variations. These are not simply thrown in as examples, either. For most of the alternate technologies, the mechanics are almost as developed as those of the core system. I'm very impressed with this decision. I think it signals a return to **Traveller**'s origins as a system flexible enough to simulate a wide variety of science fiction settings.



Distributed Preferences: I know that much ink has been spilled over the relative virtues of flat vs. Gaussian probability distributions in RPG mechanics. I am not arguing that one is superior to another in how well it simulates anything. For me, it's easier to come up with probabilities on the fly using a flat distribution such as D20.

Another important improvement in the system is bringing T:TNE up to the design standard of **Twilight: 2000** and **Dark Conspiracy**. Having a basic core system for all of a company's settings seems to be trendy in the industry right now, but trendiness is being kind to **Traveller**. One aspect of the original system I never cared for was the rigid mechanic of throwing the same target number on 2D6, subject to a bewildering number of special case modifiers. It was clumsy and largely non-intuitive. The basic **T:2000** task system of adding a skill and an attribute, multiplying by a task difficulty modifier, and rolling the target or less on D20 is smooth and quick in play. Most of the necessary modifiers are handled by reducing the number of dice rolled for hits or damage, which further streamlines the mechanics. Along with the streamlining, GDW has eliminated two other aspects of **Traveller** that put off many players: characters can no longer die during character generation, and there is a decent experience system to allow skills to increase during play.

In sum, I think this is an excellent product. GDW's design team deserves lots of credit for breathing fresh life into a classic product.



Comments

It seems rather odd to be in the position of writing a zine without comments, but I guess that's an unavoidable side effect of contributing to the first issue. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate **Interregnum**'s editor, Pete Maranci, on this new venture. In my experience, Pete is one of the most creative people I know. He has also devoted his considerable energies to promoting and developing role playing APAs over the past several years. I have every expectation that this new APA will reflect his commitment to quality, creativity, and thoughtfulness. I hope that it will appeal to a wide variety of interesting readers and contributors. Best wishes, Pete.



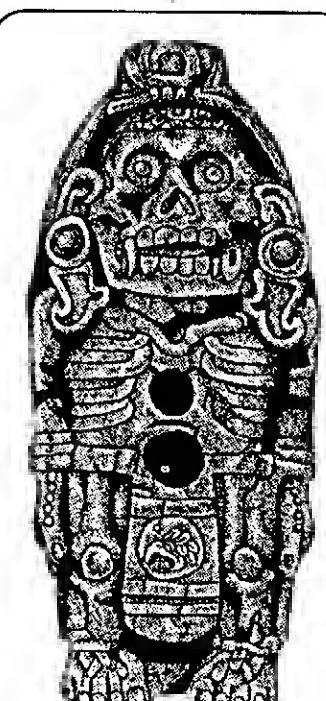
Welcome to a third issue of *Aye, Matey*. This special issue can only be found in the Interregnum #1. I, as well as most of you, was curious as to what the hell Interregnum means. I mean is it a magazine that is composed of a bunch of rags? If so I hope I am among the most wretched (I know what it really means but I thought it would be fun to see what everyone else thinks it means--hey this gives me an idea!)

Announcing the "Guess what the hell is an Interregnum" contest (no fair looking it up, or asking someone else). Send your best guess to fnam@max.tiac.net or by snail courier to Scott G. Ferrier, 81 Washington St., Apt. #2, Malden, MA 02148. All slightly amusing entries will be sent their very own very common *Magic* card, wow!

My congratulations to Pete at taking on something of a bear of a task. I do find it most disheartening when my zine for The Wild Hunt is completely out of date by the time most of the subs get their copy. I hope this is an improvement as excuses just get old after a while.

An Interview with a Prick

A year or so ago I was in a space role-playing game set in the far future. This game was started after an old one had ended. The old campaign was fun but was heavy in the combat side of things and I was getting stereotyped as the combat engine. This game as I was told by the GM was to be a much less violent game so I thought I would take the opportunity to do something a bit off the wall. So I created Alexander Adams. Alexander was one of the premier pop artists in his universe. He was remarkably untalented but had an unusual gift of honesty about it which the *elite* construed as "art." I had a bit of a hard time trying to



If you think he's ugly you should have seen what the GM wanted to do to Alexander!

CONV

ey what his personality was like so I performed an interview which I find amusing and wish to share with you.

DP-Hi! David Planth here with an exclusive interview with Alexander Walter Adams. Mr. Adams, what would-

AA-Call me Alexander.

DP-O.K., Alex, what-

AA-Look, I don't know you that well, we're not lovers and I'm not stuffy so call me Alexander.

DP-Right <short pause> Alexander, what would you say is your greatest piece of work.

AA-Nothing.

DP-Could you elaborate?

AA-No.

DP-What would you say is your greatest accomplishment in life?

AA-Getting paid for creating nothing but sh*t.

DP-<game show chuckle> OOPS. You know I can't print that.

AA-So.

DP-Do you think your rise to fame is only because you have a famous mother?

AA-Absolutely. I have no talent, and the people that like my work have a deficiency of intelligence.

ye be on page 2 swab

DP-<laughing>, I think your work is wonderful. My journal has a piece on display down at First Mutual Security Federal Galactic Bank.

AA-I believe that was my point.

DP-<smiling> Thanks!

AA-What for?

DP-They say your a nobody until Alexander insults you.

AA-You disgust me. Social dive off of somebody else.

DP-<composed> I'm sorry. Let's get back to the interview. Which of the classic artist would you say had the greatest influence on your work?

AA-What are you talking about? <screaming> I DON'T WORK! And as for classic artists, I would say that they were trying to make do until the invention of the camera.

DP-So where is your next show?

AA-I think some pathetic drips like yourself are putting me up in the Spinward Alliance to try and desperately show that they have a life.

DP-Thank you and we look forward to your show.

AA-I suppose you would.

The amusing thing about the character is that he was famous for his bold choice of colors but in reality he was colorblind.

The Scuttle

This area will be used to review great and crappy games, be they board, computer or role-playing (tabletop, live or otherwise). All the computer games reviewed here were run on a 386DX-40MHz, co-processor, 8 meg RAM, MS DOS 6.0, Windows 3.1, and a Pro Sonic I6 sound card (100% compatible with Adlib and Soundblaster cards) system.

All games are based on the Jolly Roger Scale (1-10 1 being poorest piece-o-krud ever seen and 10 being great keg-o-fun).



HELL CAB™

A Pepe Monreno Production
CD-ROM for Windows

System requirements:

PC with 386 or higher processor
3MB of RAM available under
Windows™
MPC-compatible CD-ROM drive
with a minimum 150KB/sec
transfer rate
SVGA graphics (256 colors with
640 x 480 resolution)
MPC-compatible sound card
Windows 3.1

Jolly Roger Rating-6

I have to say I had my doubts about this game. It sounded like a great premise (you accidentally step into Hell Cab where the cabby is a demon trying to earn his horns) but the execution was absolutely lousy. You spent all your time waiting for the CD to load the next footstep. It was "take a step and wait for a minute then the next step wait another minute:- and I have a double speed CD ROM! I thought it might be my processor, these days a 386-40 is

ye be on page 3 swab

wimpy, so I let my friend try it out n his 486-66dx monster and he had the same problem. Everyone I know gives up in the first section (old Rome) but I managed to stick with it and it got better (in the trcnch of World War I).

I haven't finished it yet but have put in more than 10 hours playing it. This game has some major design flaws. The most significant and is all to common with most CD ROM games is the one dimensional playing style. You have only one path to travel and to progress further down that path you have to solve a puzzle (7th Guest LEAPS to mind) or pass some coordination test. It be a much more interesting game if they had a shorter path but a plethora of choices that effect the

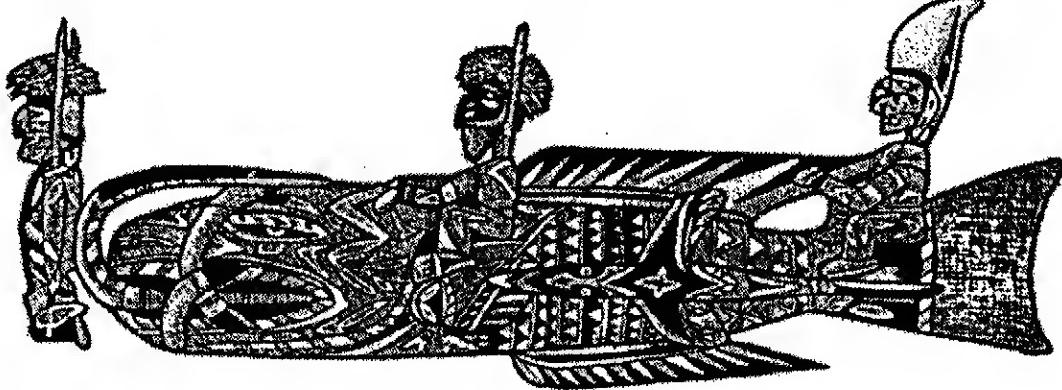
I think it would be interesting to see how this game sells in Germany as it appears that god is on the side of the French and if you help the Germans you die.

Weird Magic Ideas

After buying way too many Magic cards I have come up with a few creatures for a 1970's version if (god forbid) there ever is one.

The Psychedelic Shack- 1/1 creature that must change to a different color every turn.

The Olivia Newton John- 1/2 white creature or for the cost of one swap she is a 2/1 black creature (Grease). Tap to temporally change



It's Weird!

overall outcome differently like Sim Earth when some people had evolved robot people by dropping a bomb on a robot factory and freezing and heating the earth to keep all other lifeforms at a minimum so the robots could survive. This was one crazy result and I know a few people that would play it over and over trying to get another type of creature to survive. Perhaps they could make it so you could play the cabby and after a short interview you could try to size up your passenger and pick the places to bring him/her and the order and the way that you did it could change the overall results.

the power of an attacking creature of the same color to 0.

The John Travolta- 1/1 banding creature that for the cost of 2 mana can jump for a turn (Saturday Night Fever).

The Pinto-1/1 red creature that gets a +2/+0 for each mountain tapped, it explodes when this special ability is used and must leave the game.

Island of Pop Rocks- produces 2 colorless mana. If the Uncola Land is in play tap to get 4 colorless mana.

IFGS New England-Unlikely Beginnings

or a Creative Experiment in Bureaucracy

I know that some of you would like to know about the first game that I helped run in the IFGS (International Fantasy Gaming Society). No, really you do, when I was a young whipper-snapper like yourself... (yawn) :D I want a chance to write them down so everyone can see the dazed and confused beginnings of this humble little chapter.

It all started in (or around) August of '89. The World SF Con was in Boston and the authors of *Dream Park*-Larry Niven and Steve Barnes were attending. Also attending where Steve Levin (our founder) and Peter Sartucci (who was the liaison to the NE chapter). Steve had been corresponding with the IFGS in order to get a chapter started out here. He eventually convinced them and they sent all sorts of cool stuff (mugs, T-shirts, rules and a nifty credit card machine). But on this particular night Steve wanted us to meet with these people to talk about how to start a chapter. Steve had managed to get a table at the con and was handing out standard IFGS pamphlets (the art showed sorta a cheesy looking dweeb looking wistfully up. In a balloon above his head he is fantasizing about orcs and the words "*Live Your Fantasy*" appear above that. I honestly don't know why anybody called him after seeing that cover-the inside was cool though). As I remember it he got over a hundred people who called his answering machine stating that they were interested. Great! 100 people were interested but we had never run a game. One of the calls was from a fat jerk who happened

to think that he had a monopoly on the live role-playing thing in New England. Steve's quote was "he called me up and was trying to tell me that only he had the right to run games here." Needless to say with the diplomatic savvy of the Fat Jerk and Steve there would be no understanding or cooperation (which is sorta ironic as Steve later joined them and kept his previous affiliation a secret then quit them because they sucked even more).

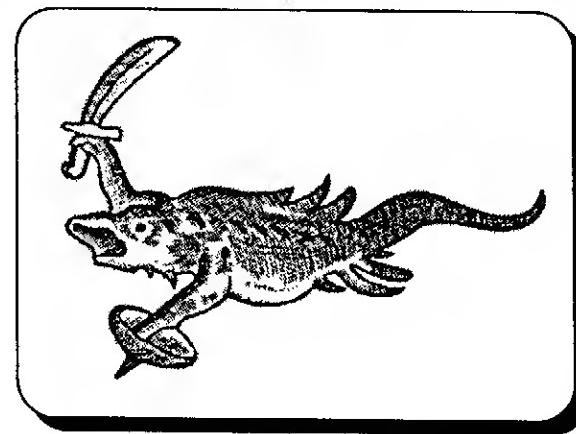
Well, Lee, Virgil, Pete, and some guy (who was so interested that he got arcane directions from Steve-not Steve's forte-and miraculously made it to his apartment and then we never heard from him again), and myself

met Peter Sartucci and one of his friends, they had brought some spare weapons with them to give to our chapter (%50 of them are still in use today, most notably the spear). Once we started whacking each other with these things we were hooked. The only casualty was a lit candle that *some guy*

could have scored a double (in baseball) with. As we talked with the National IFGS reps more and more, waiting for Steve who didn't arrive until they were ready to go, I had become definitely convinced they were not repressed freaks that needed therapy, but were instead just having a lot a fun. We were sold!

Now all we needed was a game.

Herein lies the Achilles heel of the IFGS that we didn't know. To give you a rough idea of what writing a game is like, they want you to submit your game to them a minimum of 6 months prior to your game date. You cannot run a game if it isn't sanctioned and if they sanctioned one running they still might not sanction the next, so if you were to run it again you would need to submit the very same game again and wait (if you were lucky) another six months. During that time you wouldn't know until about midnight the day



ye be on page 5 swab

before the game (or in at least one case the day of the game) if it was sanctioned and thus you could really run it. So we needed a story that was an indoor game, we didn't have one but Steve wrote one. God only knows how got it through sanctioning in only three months. He reserved a beautiful church hall on Newbury Street (in Boston) that looked very much the part of an midieval castle. Steve saw a movie that so inspired him that he wrote down the first 10 minutes of it word for word. He needed a villain called "The Mocker"-(read "Green Knight"), which I was drafted for, and a King which Pete was drafted for. I use the term "drafted" as that is pretty much what happened. Steve was so dogmatic that he didn't ask you to do something, he told you and had made plans around you doing things. Then we needed costumes, we had never done anything like this before so Steve rented a generic "kings" costume and had some stuff I could wear as "The Mocker".

The night before the game and we still didn't have any idea of what's going on, how to improvise, and had never seen our costumes. We went over to Steve's and he gave us the script. I looked at it and realizee that he expected us to memorize about 5 pages of dialog overnight. It was all strictly scripted.



I would win the contest and take off with the Kings' daughter.

The game was a contest of riddles. A contest of which would have made poor old Tolkien roll over in his grave from as plagiarism stuck with a clothyard shaft pinned his copyright firmly to his torso. I still didn't think anyone would show up. Then Pete brought up a point which was to haunt us later "What if there was a tie?" to which Steve

replied "don't worry about it, there won't be."

The day of the game, Pete and I had been up very late rehearsing our roles. I read them and made a cue card for myself to stick into the sword pommel. We had never read the rules so Pete and I were scared to death but we figured it would be a big flop and we would be done with it.

Now it's the night of the game and we are really scared! We met Steve at the church and go in to set up. There happens to be people in the room

we had reserved rehearsing some music. We wait and wait, then Steve talks to them and they leave so we can start setting up. We learned the hard way that you never want to cater these things and run a game. The six of us managed to set up a huge single U shaped table to feed 38. Oh my god! 38 people are coming to this and willing to pay money! Help! We do a dry run and Pete and I started

ye be on page **6** swab

to get the giggles. Even thinking about my lines, with the fear inside me, made me laugh. People start arriving in droves better dressed than we were.

We even had a guy dressed as a comic book character *The Question* except he was the *Exclamation Point*. Some of these people had weapons, something

that I never expected and Steve knew enough to mentioned that they had to be checked in. I grab a cup of water so I don't choke up when I'm supposed to intimidate them.

I've changed clothes and realize that I'm not going to get a chance to eat (bummer) although nowadays I would improve that in and help myself. It's showtime folks! So I lift the table that they registered at and drop it to announce my coming (it did make a wonderful noise) and enter the room with my waiters-turned-henchmen. I go through the first part and one of the PCs near me said quietly (thankfully) "didn't I see this on Showtime last month?" I barely held in the giggles. I spew on and the king convinces them to take him up on this battle of riddles. I get 1 out of 2, they get 1 out of 2, I was going to miss the next one but one of the players blurts out the answer to the riddle thinking it was for their side. I had no choice but to get that one right. The score is 2 of 3 Mocker and 2 of 3 King, I am planning to miss the next one but Steve comes over to me and tells me to get this one right. Pete can't remember the answer to the next riddle and none of the players can figure out and answer. The score is 4 out of 5 Mocker and 3 out of 5 King. We have at least a tie and possibly a win for the Mocker, each a contingency that we had never planned for. If

I wasn't scared before you can bet I was petrified now. Steve comes up to me and tells me to tell them I grow weary of this game and

to take the princess and go. A crazy idea since he the Mocker will rightly win the Princess and then would not be a criminal and make a fool of the king but alas. I take the

princess and run out the door. As we leave we slap an IFGS lock on the door which no one has ever seen before (thank god), it thoroughly confuses the PC's and we get away.

Steve announces I've gotten away and now it was time to spar. So we mingle and I talk to some well-costumed people and they explain how our system sucks and how wonderful their system was and that we should all join the Fat Jerk's game, I later tried it but that's another story (but it really blew chunks).

Davey Jones' Locker

In the future this area will contain incestuous comments that you probably won't want to read (unless you write a zine) usually kissing up to other people's zines so they say good lies about mine.

Colophon

Aye, Matey-Vol. I, Issue III was created on Ami Pro v. 3.01. Most of the graphics are provided via a cheap hand held Logitech scanner and most of the pictures are from various Dover books (also known as copyright free).

REFUGEE # 2

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The contents of this zine include are all fiction. They will include *Communications* Letters to the Editor, in which I publish letters or comments from correspondents, if by some chance I ever receive any. If you are not a regular writer, and have remarks on REFUGEE or the rest of the Hunt, send them to me at the above address. I will print at my expense what I find interesting.

Fiction

WHO SLAYS SATAN

Aaron the Goldsmith waited in the dark of his shop, a solitary candle guttering fitfully on the table before him. Candlelight gleamed off his tools and threw dancing shadows against stuccoed walls.

There came a rap on the door, twice repeated.

"Enter!" he called. The hinges creaked, revealing a tall figure in charcoal-grey cloak. Outside, a spring rain pattered and pattered off tight-shingled roofs. Aaron's visitor walked crisply toward his workbench, letting the door swing shut behind her. A shift of her shoulders tossed back her hood, revealing coal black hair and dark eyes which seemed to drink in the candlelight, letting none of it escape back into the room.

"Aaron?" she asked. Her face was hard. She waited for his nod, then relaxed. "You are the great smith, maker of enchanted tools and worker in alchemical metals?"

"Some man call me great. I like to do good work."

"You once said that with true-silver, fully enchanted, you could make chain mail so light that it would weigh no more than featherdown, yet so hard that neither sword nor spell might strike its wearer?"

"Yes, given enough of the material. But that is absurd. You would need pounds, while even the Mother Church in Glastonbury has but grains of it."

"I did not pay good gold, to talk to you at this hour,

in order to gossip about the impossible. I understand you hide your two apprentices in the darkness — you would be a fool, which you aren't, not to —" she paused, pointing at the two men, who believed themselves cloaked in darkest spell-bound shadow — "but I want your word, that you will each be silent about what you'll do."

"In time, if your request be lawful, our words will be given." Aaron's apprentices nodded their assent.

"This, then, is the true-silver." She reached into her cape, found a hidden purse, and dropped on his workbench a solid ingot the size of a large brick. He stared, touched, hummed to himself. "Indeed, indeed, it is as you said. But where did you get it?" His voice rose to an astonished quaver. "I am a goldsmith. My touch alone is enough to confirm that you've set before me the greatest treasure in all England."

"My source is mine. Some would say that I'd sold my soul for it. Those who know me know better." She grinned quietly.

"I should surely hope. So you want me to waste this most precious of all materials in armor, proof against every blade and spell?"

"I want from the silver a higher object -- a Solomon's Bottle. I will not quibble. I know your faith, and your learning. I know that you can make one, given the materials, if you so choose. But I will want your oath on a question."

"I may decline to answer, but I shall not lie." He pulled from one drawer a crucifix of burnished gold which glinted in the candlelight. She put her arm up toward her face, grimacing.

"Clever, smith. But you think I marked not your name, nor noted the mezuzah hidden beneath the doorframe? No, I want your word to your God, He of the Old Testament — the Bible."

He noted her look, her words, and produced another object, more dimly seen, from the drawer. "As the One God is my witness, as he commanded to Moses, I shall not lie in His Name."

"A Solomon's Bottle, as made of enchanted truesilver: Can you make it? Will it bind any demon? Will it bind the dark one, Satan, himself?"

"May God protect us! Yes, I can make such a device. The Law and precedents are clear, honoring the one who constructs such a tool for virtue. And once within it, no demon, not even the Fallen One, could escape. But such a bottle is useless, because the Fallen One could not be conjured (nor commanded to enter the bottle) save by a powerful necromancer. But such a darkmage, having already given his soul over to the Fallen One, would be

powerless to harm his lord by such treachery."

"I worry about using it. You worry about making it. Secretly. Can you?"

"If that is your desire. I will need enchanted gems and other substances for the Construction — selling a few grains of this material, which I could do without raising undue curiosity, would pay for the lot. But a Solomon's Bottle is a potent weapon in the armamentarium of Good: its construction will hardly sit well with those *you* serve."

"Who do you think I serve? No matter — make it! You'll need most of the metal for the Bottle, a good one, one you will rejoice in, when you set your mark in its skin. The rest of the metal you may keep. An ounce or so, I would judge."

"I always give honest work."

"You do not always give *secret* work. I want each of you, including your apprentices who think they hide from me by setting a feebly enchanted shadow about themselves, to swear that they will never speak of this meeting, and to say, truthfully, that they know not who I am, or why I've commissioned this work." She waited silently, drawing back slightly as the apprentices recited a litany of Holy Names. "How long will you need?" she hissed. "How long? You can't do nothing else, not without making people suspicious."

"That I will not do. You've made the three of us rich beyond our wildest dreams, even after you take your Bottle, and given me a chance to make my masterwork — the capstone of my career. For that we'll risk nothing. A Solomon's Bottle is more slow than difficult to enchant. I should say surely that a sixmonth is enough."

"Then I see you in October, at the New Moon. If you feel temptation, remember only that I have a long arm and longer memory."

"I should ask you, on the Cross since you are of that Faith, to swear that you will not return to rob me."

"Me?" she laughed. "Rob you? Oh no, Aaron, oh no! A stolen Bottle loses its powers, nor will it work for one who is not its owner. You have my word as to your safety."

"I hope," he warned, "you believe your own words about the Bottle and its makers. It is indeed true that you cannot betray me, save at the cost of destroying what I will build for you. Under the circumstances, I suppose you would find the oath I asked to be a more burning experience."

"Oh, Aaron, Aaron! Someday your tongue will get you into trouble!" She smiled.

"Slower than your hand will get you," he answered. "I

note how you greet the Holy Names. Still, a Solomon's Bottle is an intrinsically good artifact, whose manufacture may be properly commissioned by anyone, high or low, noble or thief, with no wrong being done."

"Enough! My ship awaits!"

"You will sail with the dawn?"

"I sail when and where I please. The night holds no secrets from me. So work well, and I may have a present for you and yours. Would not a trip to Jerusalem be pleasing?"

"To return there, though only for a single day? For you, though, going there must be daring."

"I've risked worse. You might have had more guards. But I don't fear men-at-arms, not even twenty of them, not when I have Moonshadow" — she produced a sword from beneath her cape. He recognized the tempered moonsilver as Faerie work, spell-runes inlaid into the blade and hilt — "and other ways." She returned the sword to its hilt, then gestured. The candles went out. The shop door banged open, and closed again.

* * * * *

October eve. The new moon lay in the arms of the day sky. Constellations burned through fleeting bits of twilight to float close above the earth. Two figures walked along a well-trod road, alert for other travellers.

"So what'll your final orders be, capt ... Camilla?" The speaker was an older man with stooped shoulders, gnarled hands, and bristling moustache. A pronounced roll to his walk betrayed years spent before the mast.

"I should have the Bottle tonight. I'll need the evening to use it, and then be talking to the Abbey at Caer Gwenfaire. They have an artifact whose use I want. I may be on shore for a few days. Keep the ship where you can flee to sea with the wind. If I'm out of touch look at North Cove, after dark." The answerer was a young woman with black hair and blacker eyes, whose figure was hidden under a heavy cape.

"Yes, Ma'am, but beware Caer Gwenfaire, they've th' most potent relic in all th' West there. Yes, I saw it me'self once as a boy, carried in Holy Procession, th' True Blood a' th' Savior, collected from th' Cross and miraculously preserved. For one o' Faery, it's purest poison."

"Nat, your warning is welcome. But it's still human blood that colors my cheeks, no matter how often I lie with the Prince of Tir na Na'Ogth. And that's the Relic I want. That and the books of the alchemist Humbert — Humbertus Magnus, I should say."

"You'll be th' *Blood* wanting? Oh, no, princess, now you'll

be exceeding yourself for certain. That they'll never give, though you offer them th' sack o' Byzantium."

"Not give. Just its use. They can keep it afterwards." She grinned, keeping her plans to herself.

"Princess, your nerves would slice Damascene steel. But be careful. I b'lieve Hugh'll be in yonder patch of trees. Oh, but I miss my good mail shirt."

"Safer without it. This way, short of a good search, we're just farmer and daughter, pilgrims to Caer Gwenfaire for prayer and penance, not a pair of pirates."

"specially not the Queen of Pirates and her 'umble 'elms-man."

"Shush now, lest someone other than Hugh hear." They crept into the woods. Through a patch of brush, at the outskirts of a protected town, lay the Goldsmith's shop. The travellers slipped from tree to tree, alert every step of the way, finally meeting with a third, younger, man. Aaron's shop, well lit against the dark, could be seen in the distance.

"Princess," spoke the younger man, "the shop was closed at supper, but he now has company. Three men-at-arms stand outside, and some one else is inside arguing with Aaron. Aaron expects us tomorrow, yes?, so this is no simple ambush. I could sneak closer, try to hear."

"Perhaps no need," responded Camilla. She reached to her cloak and fingered gently at an amulet underneath. Nodding dreamily, she let the sound float to her ears. Aaron's firm voice could be heard.

"...and finally, the Solomon's Bottle is an intrinsically lawful item, as all authorities agree. I have given my word that I will not name the person for whom the Bottle was made, and fully enchanted." Camilla's smile flashed. She gave the thumb's up gesture to the two men with her. "and I have sworn this before the Almighty. The King's Law says that this is my right, so long as the items made are intrinsically lawful in nature, which right you are sworn to uphold, for is not the King truly God's Steward of God's English Domain? You, Abbot Cedric, have yourself agreed that this argument has the right."

"That I have done. The making of this artifact was lawful, a brilliant piece of workmanship, a poem to the Glory of God. But the Bottle is made entirely of enchanted truesilver, which could have come from no place in England, nor anywhere on the Continent. You have sitting in front of you more enchanted truesilver, all carefully masked by truelead foil, than I have ever heard of, nay more than I'd've supposed existed in all Christendom, not to mention thirteen other ensorcelled metals, seven rubies, . . ."

"My client gave me the truesilver. Had it been stolen, or elsewise misappropriated by my client, I could not have

enchanted it. The other ingredients I obtained in lawful ways, as my records will attest. Besides, you can hardly suspect that my client stole the truesilver. After all, who could he have stolen it from?"

"Who, indeed?" pondered the Abbot. "Who, indeed. But the Bottle is a tremendously powerful thaumaturgic implement, second in my eyes only to the True Blood." Abbot Cedric paused. "In the wrong hands, notwithstanding its virtuous nature, it might lead to harm. I insist on taking it to a place of safety, where its rightful owner may claim it by identifying himself."

"We are in a place of safety. This shop is under the King's Peace. It is so protected by home-magic, woven into its walls, that only those who have rightful business here may enter either in person, or by spell, without my knowledge. Satan himself knows not what we are doing, nor what I have made. No, only the two of us, my apprentices, the Bottle's rightful owner, and the Almighty can be privy to this conversation — and the bottle's owner is not here."

"Until tomorrow eve," countered the Abbot.

"I did not say that."

"I have my ways. Your new apprentice feared he might have committed a mortal sin. And I insist upon taking the Bottle. You have been paid, smith; you do not need the Bottle as surety for its owner's debts. Canon Law and the King's Writ confirm me in this." Camilla felt the Abbot scoop up the Bottle, then heard the door slam shut behind him. As the Bottle left the shop, her hearing of what lay within dulled to near-silence. As the smith had sworn, his house-wards excluded those without lawful business.

"It's the Abbot of Caer Gwenfaire," she announced, "and a couple-three guards. They're going to the Abbey: they'll have to come this way. With my little surprise, too. We'll make an ambush. Hugh, grab the Abbot. Don't hurt him, just set a knife to his throat, so he'll try no spellcasting. Nat, if they don't yield, take the guard on the left; I'll take the other two. They think we're not coming 'til tomorrow, so they don't have a small army with them. After last time, they'd have more than three men ready to deal with me."

"All by surprise?" asked Nat.

"No, darn it! I'd better ask them politely for my property. If Aaron thinks I'm a thief, the spells he's set may do damage, no matter that I'm being properly honest. Hugh, slip up the trail; take them from behind. If the Abbot claimed King's Writ, the guards are surely King's Paxmen." Hugh nodded grimly. The ranks of Paxmen were filled near-exclusively by nominally reformed felons, most of whom saw paths for continuing their wickedness under the guise of lawful virtue.

The trio waited expectantly. Three footmen, one with a torch, tramped down the path, the Abbot following. The goldsmith brought up the rear, wringing his hands, not sure what to do. His greatest work had been marched out of his shop by a man who was not its rightful owner. The law might be on the Abbot's side; the Paxmen's swords certainly were. What should a poor smith do?

Camilla stepped from the shadows, her hood thrown back to reveal her face and black hair. "I believe," she announced calmly, "that that's my Bottle there. You did say, Abbot, that its rightful owner might appear and claim it."

Taken aback, the Abbot glared at the figure which had appeared like a sylph from the wood's gloom. His guards hesitated while he took in her form. "Owner? You? It's painfully clear to my eyes, whether this bottle was once yours or not, that you carry with you the Scent of Death. You are a necromancer, tainted of the blood, lawfully unable to hold property or pass an estate. The Bottle is thus Ours, forfeit to the glory of the True Faith."

"You've got an excuse every time, don't you? Can't you ever keep a promise? Now give me the Bottle or I may have to get rough!"

"You threaten to lay hands on me? Me, a representative of God's Vicar upon this Earth? Guards! You heard her threaten me! She is accursed! Slay her! Slay her, and the wrath of God will strike to aid glurghh ..." The Abbot's voice faded to nothingness as Hugh's knife appeared against the Abbot's throat.

One Paxman hurled his spear at Camilla, then went for his sword. Her own sword came to hand before she ducked.

The Paxmen spread slightly apart as they charged. Camilla's fear damped when she saw she might avoid having to fight them one-on-two, a maneuver she preferred to leave to hero tales. She was a skilled swordswoman, as strong as most of the men she might have to fight, but she was still in simple cloth, facing a pair of trained warriors in chain corselets and proper helmets. She stepped ahead, her moonsilver blade a flash of white as she parried the first Paxman's swing, then cut around toward his face. He dropped, leaving the second Paxman almost on top of her. She attacked with a two-handed down-stroke which sent sparks of pink and blue, steel and moonsilver, flying. Her opponent's blade shattered at the impact. He recoiled. Her second strike clove head from neck. She glanced around, finding that the third Paxman had similarly been dispatched. Hugh held the prelate at knifepoint. The goldsmith stood back, too frightened to move.

"Nat," she said, not even breathing heavily, "I get my chance tonight. You go back to the Dawnfire. If I'm not

there by first light, hide like we arranged. I'll have to bargain with him." She pointed her bloodied sword at the Abbot.

"With you," he whispered, "and your kind there can be no bargains, though my fate be joyous martyrdom."

"But you'll bargain. You will! I'll give you an opportunity you never even dreamed of having. Okay, the rest of you," she included Aaron in her gesture, "dump the bodies off the trail. Then we're going up that hill. You'll be safer with me, smith, than elsewhere. There's an open field up there. And, prelate, if you do nothing grossly foolish, I'm letting you free in the end."

"Up *that* hill?" stammered Aaron. "But there's a fairy circle. And a barrow. There're ghosts and bogies and things that slither..." he stepped away from Camilla.

"Come on, and don't be afraid of a few shadows. The rest will have to face me, if they dare." She laughed. "If his friends find you, Aaron, they'll take you for a companion of mine, or an ally, unless our erstwhile colleague" — she gestured at the Abbot — "vouches for you." Camilla pointed forcefully at the hill while her fellow pirate relieved the Abbot of the Bottle.

* * * *

The top of the knoll was naked ground on which low heather and ivy patches struggled against bare rock. Shadows around the crest hinted at a circle of great stones long since fallen. Camilla motioned the party into the circle.

Camilla set her sword down on a flat boulder and took out her wand. Wrapped in gold and silver, its inset gems gleamed like prying, malevolent eyes. The Abbot cringed. "Hugh, don't let him move," she whispered, "Aaron, stand there!" She gestured at a point a few feet to her right. "And stop blubbering, silly," she said to the prelate, "I've hardly the time to sacrifice you, even if I were the type, which I'm not."

"You aren't?" he asked incredulously.

"The world's full enough of martyr's bones, all potent against honest sorcery. Why should I make my life more difficult? Now, hush." She gestured with the wand, then spoke words in the Elder Tongue. Abbot Cedric considered a response, then decided there would be time enough later for working the Divine Will, time when a pirate's dirk was a little less firmly propped against his windpipe. A Great Circle, fitfully glowing and ten feet across, appeared around them. There followed an overlay: a second circle and pentagram, inwritten with names of hidden power. Aaron found himself at one point, Camilla at the second, Hugh and Cedric at a third. Camilla gestured again. Each witness found himself within a smaller pentacle, scarcely large enough to permit one to stand erect.

Camilla paused, mopping her brow of the slightest dusting of sweat.

She set her wand by the stone, fumbled on the ground for a small pebble, and set it by her wand. The Solomon's Bottle she stripped of its foil and set next to the pebble. Finally she took up her wand and began Calling: "Hail, Satan, Lord of Darkness, Lord of Night! Hail, Lucifer, King to Be, King of Light." She switched to the Elder Tongue, feeling something draw hugely, hungrily at her strength. She had done this before, unassisted, but she would need her power again. She directed the hunger against those with her. Hugh nodded; the Abbot shuddered. Slowly a gate to elsewhere appeared within the Great Circle. Through it rose a being, triple-headed, triple-crowned, against whose obsidian skin the night sky appeared bright. From its pores came little flames, burning blue-white in obscene imitation of the stars which tiled the quiet sky above.

"Who calls?" it asked. "Who dares to summon me, Supreme Lord of the Universe?"

"Know thou not Thy loving servant, whom Thou promised Thou would receive as Thy daughter, were she only to give over to Thee her soul?"

"Ah, yes, beloved Camilla. Ah, yes. Have you at long last seen the darkest light? Are you at last ready to seal your soul over to me, to gain the full powers which are rightfully yours? Why do you limit yourself to your fragile mortal strength, when you can call on my inexhaustible energies? But to do that, by the Silent Law from before time, I must have a gift. Yes, I must have a gift!" The being stared at the Abbot, three tongues licking in mistimed unison at three pairs of malformed lips. "Yes, a gift. Will this be the gift? After he is made ready? He will be so fine, though at the moment he would be a trifle — indigestible . . ."

"In a manner of speaking," she answered. "But first I have something else for you, something you prize far more, something without price." Camilla tossed the pebble across the circle, shattering its grip on the demon. "Yes. Something else! Me! Yes, me! Take me, take me now, if you think you're ready!" She leaned back, hips arched, breath held expectantly.

The demon hesitated in total surprise. "You are quite totally mad, and even more foolish." It leered at her pose while it stepped across the now-broken pentagram. Aaron considered his circumstances and fainted, falling against the unseen wall of his private pentacle. The Abbot raised his crucifix and began to stammer a prayer.

"Oh, be still," snapped the Demon to Cedric, "Why would I bother with you when I can have her?" The demon sprang at Camilla, wings outstretched, hissing a tritone through three serpentine throats.

Camilla dropped her wand and darted for the Bottle. For an instant she was afraid. She had but to reach in front of her, while the thing had to cross a half-dozen paces. But it was fast, faster than any man, faster than a striking cobra! Her hands reached the ears of the bottle, which fell like a baby into the cradle of her arms.

"Yes!" she screamed triumphantly, "Yes, come! Come to me, father of lies, come to me!" She raised the bottle before her, pointing its mouth at the demon. "Yes, come and enjoy, whether you will it or no. For I bear the Seal of Solomon and am the Command of Solomon, and I order you: Come to me!" The demon's screeches were a dozen swine in torment. Its clawed feet came down, slashing through the rocky soil. Wings raised a gale of air as it tried to reverse its course, tried to flee back through the still-open Gate, away from Camilla and the awful pull of the vessel she held.

Whatever power, she considered, lay in the Bottle, it was certainly using her own strength as a supplement. She felt the demon strike the Bottle and begin to be sucked within. Taloned fingers reached for Camilla's face, raking out but not quite touching her silken-smooth skin.

"Betrayed!" it shrieked. "Turncoat! Liar! Wretched sneak! Let go of me! Release me! You are a daughter of death, hence my bounden servant, so I order you: Let me be free! Your soul is mine, so you must obey." She felt another mind, an alien metallic stench, push against her will, trying to take command of her thoughts. She resisted stubbornly, waiting while the demon was swallowed up by the Bottle. When it disappeared within, she grabbed the lid and brought it down with a brilliant clang. There came in response a distant boom, as of a battering ram against a castle gate. The demon lashed out again and again at the lid. Getting the demon inside the Bottle had not been easy, even for someone of her strength; holding it within the Bottle proved little easier.

"Now, Father," she said, "I believe we want to bargain. Unless you want to find out what happens when I let the demon back out of the bottle? He may view me as a meal, but in his present anger you'll be an extra treat."

"You," answered the Abbot stiffly, "cannot threaten me. If I die by a demon's hand, my soul will go to eternal bliss. Your fate, having deliberately enraged the Lord of Hell, can scarcely be imagined."

"I don't feel like trading taunts. Nor would I be so sure of who's safe and who's not." Her shoulders strained. Once within the Bottle, the Demon was free to try to break out, at least until the Bottle was properly sealed. "I want a bargain, not a bit of piracy. I have something you want, while you have something I'll take in trade."

"Trade? An Abbot trade with an accursed necromancer?"

"Don't pretend to be naive. Simpletons don't become Lord Abbots of great monasteries. I have here a powerful demon, whose schemes have worked grave hurts on mankind. You have a relic, potent enough to purge this demon of evil." She had to stop for a moment. The pounding on the lid had become more insistent. She cradled the jar against her chest to get additional leverage. "You do, you know. Just within the Cathedral, to the left as you enter, lies a certain Relic."

"Ah, yes, the True Blood, preserved even more miraculously than the wood of the Cross. It could destroy him — and you don't even dare name that relic, do you?"

"Don't make bets on what I'd dare. Not unless you want your Abbey to obey those silly paupers' oaths. I will give you this Bottle, its contents ready for purification, for a price — a price that won't hurt your Christian soul."

"A price? For that deed? It's your Christian duty!"

She laughed. "You jest! You can't possibly think I'm a faithful Christian, can you, not when you think I'm a Satan-sworn necromancer, a Lord of Night. The next thing, you'll want to be going and making me a saint. No, in return I want material objects, things not touched with holiness. You will destroy this demon. In return, I want some belongings of the late Archimagus Humbertus Magnus: his books, his potions, and most especially a drink of his thirty-times distilled potion of eternal life. And I want to see the demon die, so I myself may swear I saw him dead. For all this, I want safe conduct for me and my crew, to the Abbey, back to the ship, and thence free to the open sea."

"Safe conduct is mine by right to give, though you'd need promise that you will obey the obligations of a guest, not to use your necromancy or skill at arms against the monastery while you stood within."

"I will be your guest, and gladly guest-right keep. You and yours I will not harm. Though I would think it better if few learn who I am, or what I am doing."

"That is acceptable. Your weapons stay here, in the hands of a third party."

"Moonshadow stays under my cloak, not to be drawn so long as my safe conduct is honored. On my name, may she shatter in my hand if I break your guestright. My wand returns to its truelead sheath, that none will know of it. Even so inerted, I cannot readily let it pass far from me."

"The books of sorcery, I fear, we have sent away, so I do not have them to give to you. Only a little hand-manual, written by Humbert in spidery fineness in a secret hand, remains."

"And the potion? *The potion?*" She would need to edge

the conversation back to the notebook. Humbert had kept a single book in a text the Abbot couldn't read, all on his studies of the lore of the ancients. The greatest part of Humbert's works were still in reach.

"The potion is a great and potent treasure, meant for a king, the Second Arthur, not for a pirate, and a woman at that."

"My offer is not inconsiderable." She tried the sound of reconciliation. "Within this jar is your greatest foe. Perhaps I should see what he will offer for his freedom."

Wealth, came the inner thoughts. I will give you gold, opals as black as your eyes, diamonds so white they outshine the snow. I will give you enchanted gems, so that your Captains are as invincible as Alexander. Your bodyguards I will clad in truesilver. You may have an empire greater than Rome's, greater than the Khan's, one which stretches from Cathay through Africa to the lands beyond the setting sun. I can raise armies for you, to sweep through all the lands of this earth, so that you may pillage a city every week for the rest of your life. The pleasures of the body I will all grant: dishes sweet beyond belief, soft silks for your bed and body, young men who will want you and caress you and never tire. Every joy, every rapture I can create for you. And, at the end, you may still escape me to Paradise. Yes, you may have all this and more, all in exchange for setting me free.

She looked at the Abbot. "You were saying, Father?"

"You wouldn't trust the Father of All Lies, would you? Once he is free, he will be at you like a hawk at a rabbit."

"I wouldn't be the first to deal with Satan," she retorted, "and come out ahead on the deal."

Oceans of sapphires, came the thoughts. Enough to float your ship. Rubies deep as the sweetest port to fill every wine cask in Europe. Emeralds to leaf a forest. Beyond the west, in distant Cibola, are whole cities fashioned all from gold. Slaves, too, you will have, so that kings will wash your feet, Grand Dukes will launder your clothes. All these I will deliver to you, if only you release me.

"I don't have all night," she said. "If you don't have the books, you can't very well give them to me. But the hand manual, in a tongue no one can read, yes, that and the potion would be a fair price. Or would you rather that I let this creature go, say in the middle of services tomorrow? Some of your monks may be safe from him, but he should have a fine time among the parishioners. Will you risk that?"

She heard peals of laughter from the Bottle. Demonic hands smote demonic bellies in hysterical laughter at the thought. Some, came the thoughts, some I should leave, that they may cause more mischief later. Yes, that is a

very funny trick, and for giving me such a meal I would almost forgive you, though your wickedness in trapping me like this has become embarrassing. At the last remark, she almost released the bottle.

"Well, Prelate, last chance. Though I'll first promise to let you go free, whether you agree or not, so that you cannot later claim I took your word under duress. What I do with the Bottle afterwards, even to sending its occupant back home, is then up to me."

"At least let me pray for guidance." She stood there impatiently, not for very long. "Yes," he said, "of course it is more than a fair trade. We trade a book which no man can read, a potion of merely secular value — for it simply prolongs one's stay in this vale of tears — and a safe conduct to an enemy who otherwise would never expose herself to the possibility of conversion. Yes, on my Oath, you may have the trade you propose."

"Swear it, then, on the Holy Names which bind you."

He answered in Latin. She shivered at the sound of those Names. "Mind you, though," he added, "if the sight of the True Blood brings you to the Faith, you are free not to leave."

"I've been tempted before. By both sides and by others. I guess conversion is a risk of life." The pounding within the jar became more insistent.

"I can help you contain our, ummh, our mutual acquaintance in yon bottle. My surplice will serve as a seal, against which he has no power, any more than he has the power to escape through the inlets tapped in the top and bottom of the vessel. Just set the bottle down on the boulder, while keeping hold of the lid." He brought the cloth deftly around the bottle's feet then up to the top. "The cloth must pass over your hand before I can tie it. I see how you take the speaking of the Names; the touch will be worse."

"I'm not bothered by a little pain. Whatever I see, whatever I feel ... it all goes away afterwards. I am not of Faerie herself, that your Names rend my actual flesh."

"Very well." He brought the surplice across her hand. She could smell her skin char at the contact. "Enough," he said, "it is tied." She let go, and glanced at her fingers. Despite the seeming of pain, her skin was unmarked.

She gestured, dissipating the remains of three pentacles. "Hugh," she ordered, "take the goldsmith and his family to the Dawnfire, if they'll go. I promised them a trip to Jerusalem, which is more than they'll have here when our Abbot's Brethren learn about tonight. They'll want the credit for the gain, and blame the innocents around them for any losses."

"To Palestine," asked Aaron, now at last recovered of

his swoon, "That is a reward beyond price. But you are right. I should be gone from here. My apprentices I sent out as journeymen a month ago, leaving them not knowing for whom the Bottle was prepared. They should be safe. Thank you, and may you come out from this as you deserve."

"Now," announced Camilla to the Abbot, "my wand goes into truelead, where none can sense it, while Moonshadow stays under my cloak. With you leading the way, I appear to be a virtuous and very timid young lady, afraid even to answer a question." She wrinkled her brows, strained, and shrank back under her cloak. "That spell, cleanly cast, will keep innocents from accidentally noticing who I am, and putting a strain on your safe-conduct." They set off through the night.

* * * * *

The cathedral was quiet, the nave nearly deserted. The Abbot led the way, taking the bows of those he met. Camilla shrank back even farther under her hood, keeping the Bottle out before her, as though she were a little girl too frightened and humble to be willing to speak. She was glad of the protection of her cloak. The light stung her eyes and sent lances into her skin. She had not signed herself over to Satan, but she had lived too long in Faerie to love the sights and sounds around her.

They went quietly to one side of the building. Alone with Abbot Cedric, she could at last set the Solomon's Bottle down on a table. What remained to be done would be his accomplishment, in which she would play at most a minor part. He looked about, finally taking a chalice large enough to hold the Bottle. Then he hesitated.

"Thus far, but no farther. I am wrong, and will not continue."

"I should have known. You won't keep promises, no matter the names on which they were sworn!"

"No! I said safe conduct in and out, and that you may have. But with this exchange I cannot proceed. You can keep the Bottle, while I protect this most Holy and Ancient Relics."

"Will you at least take a moment, and think again?" she stammered. "I bring you your faith's most deadly enemy, and you want me to turn him loose?" She grimly considered her alternatives. Killing the Abbot here, virtually on top of the altar, would have serious temporal consequences. Breaking her guest-vow would be at least unpleasant, if not completely disastrous. Would necromancy work? Could she force him to her will, make him do as she wished? Even outside the Cathedral walls, that would have been chancy. He was not a young man, and was likely far more skilled at White Magic than she was at her Art. Besides, without a wand, here where the glint

of candles tore at her like knitting needles and fishhooks, the tinkle of little bells drove spikes into her brain, the distant scent of incense bit corrosively in her nose — here would be the very worst place imaginable to practice the Great Art, even with all the time in the world in which to do it.

"I will pray for guidance," he answered. After he turned, his voice faded to a mutter. Through all the distractions, she still heard clearly a distant plop, as of water — remaining in a gutter after a heavy rain — finally making its way onto the cobblestones. The sound repeated.

"Behold!" he said. "Behold!" he exulted. "A miracle, truly given! You see?" he turned, letting her see the vessel he carried. Drop after drop of blood had fallen from above, splattering against the walls of the chalice. She peered upwards, images of icons like sandpaper against her eyelids. There was the Cross, and there, dripping from the painted wounds, came entirely real blood, a crimsoned stream descending with utter precision into the waiting vessel.

"Can you still deny the Faith?" he asked. She shook her head, managing to force a smile. "Well, the Lord has remarkable ways. But with this Sign, I can hardly deny your request." He drew from a cabinet a polished crystal flask wrapped in bright-polished steel.

Her knees turned to jelly at the sight. The liquid within might or might not be authentic, but the power it embodied tapped at her strength like nothing else she had ever encountered. Stone-visaged, she made herself stand straight, so that he would find no weakness in her, no matter what his damnable relic was doing to her reserves. "See? See!" he announced. "the True Blood, holiest relic in half the world. Can you not feel its power?"

"Yeah, that I can do," she agreed, nodding dizzily. "Shall we get this over with? The longer we're here, the more your neck is out on your promises, and the closer mine may be to the noose."

"Oh, very well. I've done this often enough before, though against lesser menaces. It is not complicated, though first we must recover my surplice."

"You want it back? What's going to keep in," she remembered to lower her voice, "our mutual friend here?"

"Why, you of course. That's the way it must be. The demon must be allowed a chance to struggle against its fate, a final chance to escape to perdition. Besides, the Blood can hardly be allowed to come in contact with an artifact as imperfect and artificial as a piece of cloth. No, only the chalice, the Jar, and your hand — the last of these being a creation of the Almighty, hence formally perfect — may be allowed to contact the Blood. You hold the Demon there until the Bottle is entirely submerged

in the, uhh, the liquid, and wait a few more moments. It will be obvious when you may let go."

"Understood," she answered. She swallowed bile; her stomach was near to revolt. The Cathedral was bad enough. Having one hand submerged in the artifact, whatever it really was, would be unimaginably worse. She slipped her hand under the surplice, smelling her flesh burn though she knew that no harm was coming to her.

The dreams, the temptations, returned to Camilla. A queen, came the voice, you shall be my queen. You shall rule Hell as a queen. I shall supply you with wealth and power, and all else you can imagine, forever and ever. The souls of Hell will be yours to torture. We may share my domain as equals. Just let me out! Out! Now! Let me out! She ignored the voice, set the bottle into the chalice, and forced down with all her strength on the lid.

The Abbot began to pour a liquid which looked more like fluid essence of Ruby than human blood. The dreams continued, mixed now with threats — or were they simply feelings? — of hideous pain. The blood reached her fingers, her palm, her wrist. She remembered an initiation in distant Africa, in which she had had one hand submerged in boiling water, all the while having to sing cheerful songs. She felt her bones bake to charcoal. The slightest of moans escaped her lips. This was worse than Africa.

The wait felt long beyond all imagining, though by the clock of her heart only a few moments passed. The nave filled with brilliant light, then went dark again. A white glow was rising through the bottle, through her hand, up toward the rafters. The light coalesced into a figure. Lucifer! Prince of Light, but no longer the black flame, the eater of the night, who she had known. Now He was the living light, shift, veiled in polychrome draperies, transformed into another being.

She began her retreat, not seeing how the Blood returned to its original container. Little good, she thought, that Lucifer had changed his looks. He had escaped the Bottle, defied the Seal of Solomon, and now would take his revenge. Her instincts called for her to run, though without a Circle, without a chance to use her wand before he could reach her, she had no way to escape, no hope of offering effective resistance. When he came for her, she resolved, she would go for her sword, to go down fighting. The Abbot's guest right did not mean that she could not defend herself. Nor, she sensed, would the magics residing in this place hinder her in raising spells against demons.

"Thank you." Lucifer's voice rang of a thousand chimes, bringing with them the redolent odor of freshly cut flowers at a Summer's dawn. "I thank you, though you do not understand, though you will suffer bitterly for your deeds. Thank you, for I am returned to the light." The Lucifer-figure peered skywards and vanished.

"Some day," she said to the Abbot, "Someday, I'd like to know what that was. The demon is dead?" The Abbot nodded. "So let's go. I kept my part of the bargain, though it cost a trifle more inconvenience than I thought it might. Now, you keep yours."

"Of course, daughter." His eyes lifted over her shoulders, his face paling to sudden surprise. Camilla sensed a trap, tried to turn, and found herself pinned, with two men holding her arms and a third putting a brawny clutch on her neck.

"Hold the vixen tight," came the voice from behind her. "Don't want her to escape."

"Your Oath!" she spat at the Abbot.

"Truly, I know nothing of this. You there! In the name of God! And your oath of obedience! Release her. She is here under safe-conduct, properly and fully sworn."

"No!" barked a counterman. Twisting her head, she made out a face she knew all too well — the Lord Inquisitor. Abbot Cedric and the Inquisitor locked eyes. "Abbot," I announced the Inquisitor, "I judge your vow to be invalid. As we are equal in rank, if we disagree your recourse is to appeal to Rome. Of course, I just might find it convenient to burn this witch before then. But you did not break your oath. Had the Almighty not led me to this place and time, had he not inspired me to peer in here, some time ago, I would never have known what was happening, for certainly men of lesser skill would have been fooled by the spells she has woven to hide herself. I certainly would never have interrupted the glorious miracle we have just seen, in order to catch this piratical tramp a few moments sooner. I even cast Silence upon my men, that we would not risk disturbing what transpired. But — as a matter of Canon Law — it is my duty to capture and burn necromancers, and I shall perform my duty."

She relaxed, feigning resignation. Her chances for escape were probably better now than they would be after they searched and disarmed her. She leaned down, her captors following. Her boot came down hard on the right-hand man's sandals, followed with an elbow to the ribs. As his grip slipped, her now-free hand swung hard at the left-hand man's jaw. The crunch told her that he was out of the fray. They had the mass of numbers, but if she could reach Moonshadow things would even considerably. She dragged her last captor off balance, trying to throw him over her shoulder as the *Dawnfire's* East Asian cook had taught her. Meanwhile a hard kick to the side finished off the man to the right. The man behind her had the weight of an ox, and went over agonizingly slowly. She managed to reach her sword, began the draw. In the corner of her eye, she caught glimpses of a dozen armed men. Then her world exploded in darkness.

* * * * *

Camilla awoke, at first not knowing where she might be, or how she might have gotten there. She was standing, chained to a wall, bonds across her chest and under her arms supporting her weight, arms pinned spread-eagled. She had been taken from behind, then knocked over the head. Something had called, awakening her. What? She could hear a fly buzzing, but not even the distant sounds of voices or men working. What had drawn her awake?

She risked opening her eyes, and found herself in a monk's simple cell. The light in the corridor spoke of late afternoon. It had to be the next day. Her head split with pain. She tried to look out with second sight. She hardly expected it to work. Not here, not so far from Faerie. The room was a golden flame. A Saint had lived here, done his good works here, and finally died here. His deeds lived after him, blinding her inner vision. Look beyond the fire, she told herself. Look beyond!

Willy-nilly, Camilla saw the cathedral nave lined with monks, clergy, and men-at-arms in polished armor. Had she been unconscious through to Sunday? It hardly seemed likely. Then she saw what lay near the altar, still wrapped in its truelead foil. Her wand. Clairaudience was almost always beyond her, but for the moment she could hear the voice of the Inquisitor, reciting in ill-accented Latin. His intent was obvious. He had the wand, and now would destroy it. She tried to reach out, to use the power indwelling in the wand against him. Even without the relics about him, using a magic implement — an unshielded implement, let alone a shielded one — at that distance was virtually impossible. She failed. He drowns through his prayers, voice as nasal as a snuffling pig, then paused while the wand was exposed. It lay on the table, its gems' inner light competing with cathedral candles and the glare of the sun through cathedral stained-glass panes. She tried again to strike against the Inquisitor, again without success. "Go now!" shouted the Inquisitor. "Go again into the dust!" He brought up his hand, gesturing. Around the room, each of his audience copied the motion. Her second sight filled with the brightness of the solar disc. Through it, momentarily, she could see alchemical ruby and sapphire striving to hold their forms against the light. The wand crumbled to dust.

She gagged as the shock recoiled on her, as her symbolic ties to her wand were shredded. She had not eaten in a day. Her stomach brought forth nothing. Probing fingers stirred the dust. The laws of similarity transformed them to stilettoes driving down her spine. Ashes were drenched in holy water; acid ate through her eyes to her brain. Finally she collapsed against the chains, unable to think, hoping the pain would pass.

The corridor outside held dim twilight. Her clarity of thought returned. Her clothing was stiff with her own sweat, now grown cold. An older man in habit and cowl sat across the room, waiting patiently for her recovery.

If he had wanted, she considered, he could have slit her throat without her putting up the least resistance.

"Ah," he intoned, "The witch awakes. I hope you found your slumbers comfortable?"

"You must..." She tried to clear her throat. Her voice was gone.

"Wait." He filled a bowl with water. "Drink! Don't worry, it's not poisoned. We are, after all, a monastery, not some baronial torture chamber." The water went down her throat, cold and sweet. "M'Lord Inquisitor thinks that we ought feed you on holy water, properly blessed. But that would be cruel. It isn't as if we are decided what to do with you. M'Lord Abbot's promise of safe-conduct, his holy word binding this whole order and its secular guards, cannot lightly be ignored, M'Lord Inquisitor's protestations notwithstanding. You may be formally M'Lord Inquisitor's prisoner, but almost all of us here must live under M'Lord Abbot after M'Lord Inquisitor leaves."

"I seem to be less than unhurt."

"You live. M'Lord Inquisitor hoped that by now you'd be meeting the pleasures of the rack, or the stake; indeed, he's got half his men collecting the driest of pine branches for your auto-de-fe. But we, the senior brethren, don't agree as to what is lawful in your case. Peter!" He called over his shoulders. "She's awake. Perhaps her story will be worth a hearing."

Brother Peter, a short, corpulent man with the eyes of a greying ferret, slinked into the room. A sash around one arm was woven in the bloody colors of the Lord Inquisitor's personal service. He hobbled forwards, stared icily over Camilla's body, and slumped into the pallet opposite her. "I am a truth-smeller," he wheezed, his voice an old man's high, thin-pitched squeal as it passed between dirt-brown teeth. "Do not bother with lies, unless you want your body to take penance for your errors." She glared at him contemptuously. "Now, how did you bribe M'Lord Abbot to get in here. Was it gold? Threats? Perhaps, perhaps the use of your body?" He sniggered.

"Oh, Peter," complained the other man. "Show some respect for your betters."

"Look at that spread, those hips, those legs! For that body, most young men would have plenty of respect. Well, witch, how did you do it? Blackmail?"

She stared at him, cogitating. His truthsense gave him an aura which was plainly visible to her inner eye. She felt his power, concluded that she could probably lie if she wanted to, but that lying would be one more drain on what remained of her strength. "Do you really want to know?"

"Of course! I asked, didn't I?"

"I offered him the chance to do good — to do something he thought would be good," she hastily corrected. "I gave him the chance to destroy a demon. Not any little house-imp or poltergeist, either. I offered him a great and powerful devil. In return I was promised safe-conduct in and out, that I might see the demon's fate without losing my neck."

"That was all? Safe conduct? And seeing the deed done?"

"Safe conduct. He promised me that which I value far more than anything else — a long life." She felt his power brighten as he reached out, confirming the truth of her thoughts.

He drew away, his power retreating from her, suspecting that there must be some evasion which he could not grasp. She thanked her good sense, once again, for having forced her through a rigorous study of logic. Truth was a fine-bladed razor, far too sharp for the muddlehead across the room from her to grasp firmly. His sense only told him that she thought she had told the truth.

"So, you offered him a demon? Which one?"

"Surely even the Lord Inquisitor recognized ..." She shut her mouth, recognizing the trap laid for her. If she named the demon, she would eventually be maneuvered into admitting that she had raised it, for that demon did not show himself uncalled. For raising a demon, no matter how holy the cause, the Lord Inquisitor would then argue that it was certainly just that she be burned.

"I want your name for it!" He rose and crept slowly across the room, punctuating each step with screams and insults. "Your name! Well, answer me! Where did you get the demon?" He slapped her hard, twice, then lifted her by the hair, jerking her forward against the chains. "The name! The name! What was its name! How did you raise it?"

"I have the Abbot's safe-conduct, sworn to," she gasped in pain, "sworn to Jesus, Mary and all the saints." The last words tumbled out. To her surprise, her head did not crack with agony on speaking those Names. He pushed her back against the wall, fist against the base of her rib cage. She tightened her stomach muscles, expecting worse to come.

"Well, so you do, at least for another hour or so." He slapped her again, not quite hard enough to leave bruises. "But soon this changes. I have the next round of guarding you, from an hour hence through the night. I expect a little material penance is demanded. For the health of your soul."

To be continued

